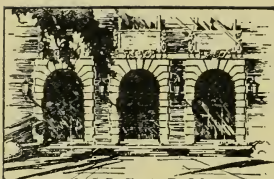




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ZOHRAB
THE HOSTAGE.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
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Z O H R A B

T H E H O S T A G E.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "HAJJI BABA."

Hatred after hatred has been manifested by thee, O Tyrant Chief! and
thy secret rancour has been revealed.

THE POEM OF AMRU, IN THE MOLLAKAT.


THIRD EDITION,
REVISED AND CORRECTED,
WITH ILLUSTRATIVE NOTES, NOW FIRST ADDED.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
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1833.



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Z O H R A B.

CHAPTER I.

Vour, beat; *voursûn*, let him beat; *vouralem*, let us beat; *vourûn*, beat ye; *voursûnlar*, let them beat.

VIGUIER'S TURKISH GRAMMAR.

THE Shah had passed a disturbed and sleepless night. Such an event, proceeding very frequently from indigestion and an unpropitious stomach, was always rumoured about the court, and even the city, with dismay. It was usually accompanied by acts of cruelty and violence, and in proportion as the disorder had destroyed the equanimity of his mind, so were the results more or less fatal. The Humpback, who was always a close observer of signs, knew to a certainty by the position of the wrinkles on the faces of the ferashes and other attendants upon the King, what was the temper in which his majesty had risen. He accordingly knew how to shape his own conduct and speech; in the act of shav-

ing he knew what part of the head he might venture to take liberties with, and with what he ought to deal delicately. In good-tempered days he would play with impunity with the one or two hairs which grew about the chin and cheeks : when indignation was raging and the temper hot, he carefully abstained from trespass on the irritable parts, and just glanced lightly over those spots which incautiously touched might lead to an explosion.

Approaching the person on the present occasion, he soon discovered that all was not right. Sadek was standing thoughtfully lounging in the ante-room, with one hand stuck in his girdle and one foot against the wall. Hashim's vivacity had forsaken him ; and the chief physician, the Hakim Bashi, was about taking his departure, with his eyebrows running under his cap, with an air of apprehension that might have suited some wretch on the verge of life and death.

The expert barber, deeply learned in all the circumstances of time, place, and opportunity, crept almost unnoticed into his master's presence.

He found him, in fact, looking like an impending thunderstorm. The countenance was everywhere lowering, the flashes of the eye were various, cross, and uncertain, the tone of voice was hoarse and portentous. As soon as he perceived the operator, he broke out into invective.

“Where have you been?” said he in anger, “you crooked dog, you apology for a man! Is the Shah to wait for your razor as he would for the day of judgment?”

“As I am your sacrifice,” said the barber with great coolness, preparing the shaving materials at the same time, “the sun has not yet risen, and your majesty is generally not out of the bath till half an hour past. Your slave has been in readiness since the dawn.”

“What has the sun or the dawn to do with the head of the Shah? You old no-man, do your work and no more.”

Upon this the Humpback began his usual operation, thoughts filling his mind, whilst it became convenient for him to be sparing of his words. In fact, he saw that no opportunity could be so fitting as the present for introducing

the scheme which he had planned in order to bring on the marriage of Zohrab with Zulma. He therefore calmly waited for the usual question, which he knew would not fail to come from the Shah, of "What news is there to-day?" before he ventured to lead the conversation into any new channel.

"*Cheh haber est?* what news is there in the city to-day?" said the King.

"As I am your sacrifice," said the barber, hesitatingly, "there is nothing at your service; but ——"

"But what?" said the Shah, "if there is a *but*, there is news; what has happened?"

"Men say," said the Humpback, "that the Mazanderani has given his answer to the Nasakchi Bashi; he won't have his daughter."

"Given his answer!" said the King, almost choking, whilst his ghastly head, half shaved and half lathered, exhibited a result of most unseemly form and colouring. "What answer has he to give? has he not the Shah's order? therefore who wants his answer?"

"So it is said," answered the barber, pro-

ceeding apparently in great unconcern with his work. "By all accounts 'tis a youth of crooked conduct."

"Where did you hear this?" said the King: "none of the ill-favoured, whose duty it is to report this, have yet spoken; how do you then know it?"

"May I be your sacrifice!" said the Humpback, "the Nasakchi Bashi was afraid to lay his representations at the foot of the Shah until he had tried every means of success, and therefore commissioned your slave to speak to the youth. Your slave did speak, but he treated me with the same degree of contempt that he did your majesty's chief executioner."

"And he refused to obey my commands?" said the Shah with great vivacity, tearing one of the napkins from under his chin.

"He did," said the barber.

"And what did the unsainted youth say?" replied the King with the same warmth.

"He said," said the crafty intriguer—"that is, after I had urged the royal commands, after I had dwelt upon the unheard-of condescension

of the Shah, the prospects that were opening to him of advancement and protection, the charms of the individual herself, the honours without calculation that were thus heaped upon him—he said, All that might be very good, but as for the commands of the Shah, they were of no avail with him, since he had but one king to whom he owed all his obedience, and that was his own father.”

“ Did he say so ? By the head of the king I swear,” roared out the grim monarch ; “ let the men of Irân spit in my face, and tell me I am not their Shah, if this burnt father’s whelp does not rue this before to-day’s noon.—And so he calls his unclean father ‘ king ? ’ King indeed ! I will defile such a king’s father’s grave. Call hither the executioner’s gang. Tell Sadek to come before us.”

The wily barber having now worked upon the Shah’s passions beyond what he had intended as serviceable to his purpose, found that it became necessary to lower them a few degrees ; and to this end he said with hesitation, still slowly fumbling over the head upon which he had operated—

“ *Be cheshm*, upon my eyes be it !”

“ Go then,” exclaimed the enraged King—
“ go, call the ferashes, and call also the chief executioner.”

“ Your slave goes ; but he has but one representation to make before he goes. Shall the Prime Vizir know your majesty’s wishes ?” said the barber with great diffidence.

This in some measure lowered the King’s impetuosity, and after a moment’s reflection he said with petulance, “ What may that be to you, you old dog ? What is the Vizir to you, or you to the Vizir ?”

“ Your slave is less than an ounce of dust,” said the cringing barber, “ but the Prime Vizir may possibly wish to avert the punishment which the asylum of the universe may deem it right to inflict upon this disobedient miscreant.”

“ Well,” said the Shah, “ and then——”

“ If it were inflicted at the Nasakchi Bashi’s house in private, instead of making it a public exhibition, every object would be secured ; the Shah’s orders would be executed, and your slave humbly conceives all would go right.”

The angry monarch, upon hearing this, held his peace, and allowed the operation of shaving to be finished without a word more being spoken; but just as the barber had secured his apparatus, and was about taking his leave, he said, "Send hither the chief executioner."

The Humpback lost no time in obeying this command, for he knew the jealous nature of his master, who would adopt a hint received in private, whilst he would reject a piece of advice given in public, because it did not originate with himself, and he felt in this instance that the Shah would not fail to issue his commands in consonance with his advice.

The chief executioner had no sooner appeared than the Shah said to him, "It is evident that you are one of those ill-begotten knaves who think it right to keep truth locked up in the chest until it comes out of the key-hole. Why have you not informed us of the disobedience of the Mazanderani youth?"

The man of blows was so much taken aback by this abrupt accusation, that he had scarcely time to stroke down his beard preparatory to

an answer, ere the Shah again said, “ We know all that has happened ;—whether it be for life or death, for joy or grief, for ruin or prosperity, our orders are positive, and you know that we do not make a joke of our decrees. *Bero*, go ! we give the Mazanderani but one chance more. Say to him, The Shah sends you this alternative—punishment or marriage. If he agrees to marry, ’tis well—call the musicians, make ready the dower, prepare the feast, and, in the name of Allah ! let the wedding be. But should he persist in refusing your daughter, then bring forth the *felek* and the sticks, collect your strongest ferashes, and let them strike till you can’t tell one foot from another. When that is done, let me know. We are upon our musnud, and are an absolute Shah ! Go !”

“ *Be cheshm !* upon my eyes be it !” said the Nasakchi Bashi, and, making a solemn prostration, took his leave. He hastened home, swelling with consequence at the confidence which was thus placed in him, and full of malignant satisfaction at the revenge which he was about to take upon him who had rejected his daugh-

ter's charms. "The king is a king, 'tis true," said he to himself, "but I am his chief executioner, and I have a musnud to sit upon as well as he." No sooner had he reached home than he ordered the dewan khaneh, or saloon in his principal court-yard, to be got in readiness, the curtain before it spread out, the fountain to be set playing, and a thick musnud to be doubled up in the corner, for himself to sit upon in his utmost state. The Humpback by this time had arrived, and having excited the ardour of the executioner by some hints of his own, he immediately visited his daughter in the harem, to inform her of what was about to take place, and to make her prepare for the tragedy which was on the eve of performance.

All was now in readiness : the ferashes, each with a powerful green poplar stick in his hand, stood in solemn silence round the basin ; the awful *felek* lay in front upon the ground ; the savage executioner was seated at his post ; the Humpback was crouched on the carpet some two yards farther off ; when the deputy executioner was ordered to produce before the

assembled party the person of the prisoner Zohrab.

After a pause of sufficient length to allow the prisoner to be brought from his own apartment to the place of violence, during which time little was heard excepting the bubbling sounds of the kalioun which the Khan smoked in great dignity, the unfortunate Zohrab made his appearance. When he came near, no invitation did he receive to sit,—a common civility due to his rank; he saw nothing to conciliate, but every thing told him that violence was in contemplation.

Standing face to face to the chief executioner, the one in the court, the other seated at the open pillared front, Zohrab received not even a word of civility, but the first phrase which struck his ear was as follows, delivered in the most brutal of voices :

“ I who am the chief executioner, on the part of the Shah, the king of kings and asylum of the universe, am ordered to ask you, for the last time, whether you will obey his orders, marry the lady Zulma, and become his servant,

as proposed by the Prime Vizir. If you agree, your head shall touch the skies—the city shall ring with revelry—a wedding will take place such as has not been seen in Tehran for years, and Zohrab Khan, with a firman in his cap, and the most beautiful maid of Irân in his anderoon, will be the happiest and most envied of men; but if you refuse, here is the *felek*, there the ferashes; I, who am the executer of the Shah's commands, am here also; and such a bastinado will ensue, that there shall not be branches enough upon the trees, or arms strong enough to wield them, ere I cry hold. Speak! in the name of Allah! speak."

As soon as Zohrab had in some measure recovered from the state of amazement into which this abrupt speech had thrown him, indignation at finding himself thus situated and thus addressed, rose uncontrolled in his breast, and he exclaimed, "Men without souls! miscreants! instruments of a lawless tyrant! ye less than dogs! will you frighten me by your base proposal? Whatever I have said, I have said. Your daughter, iniquitous old man! I know not.

I have never seen her. She may be all and more than she has been described to me. I therefore have nothing to say against her. But were she beautiful as Shireen, pure as a heavenly Houri, and excellent as the blessed Mariamne,* forced upon me as she is in this manner, I would reject her; ay, if I had a thousand tongues in my head to repeat what the one which God has given me now says, I would repeat that I will not have her—that I reject her—that I reject the Shah and his service, and that I call upon you all, miscreants and wretches that you are, to do your worst.”

As soon as those who were assembled heard these words, those who had beards stroked them, and all pulled up their moustaches. The *ferashes* seized their sticks in the proper place for striking, and seemed to await with impatience the order to fall upon their victim. The Humpback threw a scowl over his satanic features, as indicating how much he would strike if it were his business so to do; and the Nasakchi

* Mahomedans revere the Virgin Mary, whom they call *Mariamne*.

Bashi himself at once asserted his office and offended dignity, by throwing his cap on one side of his head : placing his hands on either hip, and raising himself on his heels, he exclaimed, “ Did ye hear, O men ! did ye hear the words of this madman ! If he will eat abomination, that is his business, not ours. We are the Shah’s servants — our duty is to obey his orders. Seize him, in the name of Allah ! and lay on.”

Upon this two of the stoutest stepped forward to lay violent hands upon the youth. As they approached him, he exclaimed, “ Stand off ! I will cede to nothing but superior force.” They still approached, when seizing one by the neck, he threw him with a tremendous force on the ground ; and taking the other by the girdle, he impelled him forward in the air as if he had been a ball. Never yet had this undaunted youth exhibited his strength before the Persians ; and this specimen of his prowess excited a pause in their proceedings against him, no volunteer among them being willing to venture a second seizure. Zohrab stood like a lion at bay ; his

noble countenance animated by indignation and contempt of his assailants, seemed to say, "Give me more fitting antagonists ; let me have a fair struggle for life, and I am content to die." The idea that he was doomed to be ignobly beaten like a common malefactor, lashed up his feelings of pride into frenzy ; and had a thousand such as those assembled before him, proceeded to assail him, he seemed prepared to encounter them all single-handed. At length the Nasakchi Bashi, seeing that no one appeared inclined to put the King's commands into execution, rose from his seat, and said in a loud voice, "What is this ? a pair of feet to be beaten, and twenty pair of hands unable to do it ! Children of burnt fathers ! seize him, or by the beard of the prophet, by the Shah's head, I, with my own hand, will cut each of your heads off one by one."

"We have had to do with men hitherto," said one of the hurled louts, slowly rising from the throw he had received, "but this is a devil."

"This is Rustam in person," said the other ;

“ we can attack any thing that Persians can produce, but who ever thought of facing this Mazanderani ?”

The Humpback then arose, and with the eye of a beast of prey glancing on its victim, stepped forward, and roared out in a voice of thunder—
“ Ye call yourselves the Shah’s servants, ye unsainted cowards ! and are afraid of one man. Go, seize and tie the wretch with a double tie in the *felek*.” Upon this there was a simultaneous movement among the ferashes, headed by their deputy, for the purpose of seizing Zohrab. The various sounds of “ Seize him ! strike him ! burn his father ! attack his mother ! cut his head off ! let me go ! go you !” and many such, came from the assailants, whilst the repeated cries of “ Stand off ! — Have you no shame, cowards ! — I ’ll slay the first who advances !” from Zohrab’s animated voice, was heard ever and anon, like the discharges of heavy ordnance amidst the din of small arms. The advancing party had now surrounded their victim ; he had thrown one or two down, others

had seized his arms, more threw themselves upon him; the chiefs were urging their men on; the gallant youth was about being overpowered, when the small gate of the harem was thrown violently open, and a female, closely veiled, but of exquisite form and grace, ran swiftly forward, exclaiming as she ran, "Hold, desist! O ye men of nought—cowards! I, who am a woman, attack me, not that lion;" then joining in the fray, she pulled one away, seized another by the arm, accosted the chief, spoke violently to the Humpback, until she succeeded in drawing off the whole gang, leaving Zohrab alone, breathless with exertion, though unbroken in spirit. During her efforts to release Zohrab, her veil had partly fallen off, and she exhibited to his view a face beaming with animation—with intense vigour of expression, and possessing every beauty that belongs to imperious looks and great dignity of demeanour. Her eyes spoke strong passion without softness; her mouth, beautifully formed, was compressed, as if unaccustomed to smile; her brow, which

would have befitted the tragic muse, was severe though majestic ; and the whole outline of her head and person was made to inspire admiration, but admiration without love. Thus were Zulma and Zohrab brought face to face. Zohrab's first impulse was to turn his eyes towards his deliverer ; and though he at once discovered to whom he was indebted for his release, and in how awkward a position he stood towards her, yet he had presence of mind enough, aided by his natural civility of manner, to surmount the disgust which her conduct, however flattering to himself, created in his breast, and to express, with looks of profound respect and gratitude, how thankful he was for her interference. To describe her expressive looks at this moment, varied by a host of contending emotions, perhaps would be impossible ;—there was truth in the whole of her zeal in favour of the man she had protected, although it was founded on the falseness of a concerted intrigue. She would have spoken, but the strangeness of her position deprived her of the power of utterance. What she principally desired was, to hear

the voice of the man she loved pouring out the effusion of his gratitude to her. She scarcely heeded the astonished looks of the by-standers—the angry countenance of her father, fearful of remissness in his duty, yet still more apprehensive of the violence of his daughter; the band of executioners retreating before a woman, and knowing not what countenance to keep on so unheard-of a proceeding; and lastly, the wily Humpback, fully prepared for the scene which had taken place by previous arrangement, and laughing in his sleeve to find that his scheme worked so entirely in the manner he had intended.

Matters could not remain long in this state, and accordingly many seconds did not elapse ere the responsible chief, the Nasakchi Bashi, exclaimed to his daughter—"I am indeed surprised—you, a daughter of mine, to interfere with the Shah's commands! For the love of Khoda, return to your anderoon and to woman's doings, and leave to me the execution of my master's orders;—there is danger in delay."

"Is it thus that you know your own daugh-

ter?" answered the intrepid maiden: "I am not that Zulma known to all the world, if you think to frighten me with speeches such as these. I have helped to punish the guilty, but never the innocent. That man, (pointing to Zohrab,) whom but for me you would have killed, is not to be treated like a Jew or an Armenian; he ought to be the pride of our country, and not spurned at like one of its dogs. Shame on ye all!—on the Shah first—on you, father, next—and on ye all," turning to the assembled ferashes, "for taking advantage of the weakness of one to assail him in a body!"

"What are we to do then?" said the Humpback in his softest manner; "will the Begum rather put our lives in jeopardy, and save the youth for a few protracted hours; or make him, by her fascination, accede to the Shah's wishes, and thus doing away with the necessity for violence, make us all happy, beginning with the King first, and ending with himself?"

"Ah! would it were so," said the maiden in a subdued tone: "I ought to be the last to

“speak ;” at the same time throwing one of her softest glances at the scarcely conscious Zohrab, “ Let the Khan himself speak,” said she, “ he sees how much depends upon him.”

Zohrab, notwithstanding the horror and disgust which he felt at the whole of the Shah’s proceedings against him, still could not but feel flattered at the interposition in his favour of one so beautiful as the chief executioner’s daughter. He was dazzled by her beauty, awed by her audacity, and astonished at her quickness and intelligence. Willingly would he, however, have retreated from a scene in every way so disagreeable to him, but, called upon as he was to say something on an occasion where he ought to feel grateful, and on which he really did feel thankful for having been saved the mortification of an ignominious punishment, he said with some hesitation—“ What can I say?—benefits such as you have conferred upon me demand my utmost gratitude. My senses can scarcely believe their own testimony—I have been saved from ignominy by the hand of some kind angel. You have made me your slave for ever. I am

your slave, O lady !—do with the unfortunate Zohrab what seems fitting to you.”

He would have continued to go stumbling forwards with unmeaning and commonplace phrases such as these, had he not been stopped by the intriguing barber, who had now, so he conceived, attained the object which he had in view ; namely, to bring Zohrab and Zulma face to face, to make the latter confer upon our hero such a benefit as must draw forth his gratitude, and ultimately, he hoped, give rise to a passion which would end in their desired union. He said to the youth, “ In truth, Zohrab Khan, it is plain that you will now satisfy our wishes. We are all grateful to you — may your house prosper ! Inshallah, please God, you will no longer receive trouble. Your business will shortly be put into proper train.”

Every body present now wished to say something, but the Humpback would in no manner allow them. The chief executioner was desirous to inquire why the King’s commands should not be put into effect ? Zohrab, afraid lest his commonplace speeches should be misapprehended,

was anxious to explain their meaning. Zulma, anxious to protract her interview with the man of her heart, was unwilling to leave his presence; but the man of intrigue, without delay, did his utmost to break up the assembly. To the chief executioner he said, "Do you not see that the youth has agreed to the Shah's wishes? Wherefore detain us longer? Send him away." To Zulma he whispered, "Say no more at present; all will go well: you did your part admirably. Go, go to your apartment, and I will come to you soon." To Zohrab he said, "Pardon all the inconveniences to which you have been put. These are wretches who have no understanding; they are Turks.* Let me entreat you to go and take your rest, and let us not incommode you more."

His efforts succeeded. Zohrab returned to his solitary lodging; Zulma to her anderoon; and the Humpback remained to explain matters to the Nasakchi Bashi.

"You are a man of wonderfully slow percep-

* This is an epithet of contempt in the mouth of a Persian.

tion," said the Goozoo, after they were seated. "Did not you see the impression which the sight of your daughter made upon the young hot-head? Say that there is such a thing as a lord of understanding in the world, after what you have seen to-day! How is a man, and such a man as Zohrab, to fall in love unless he sees the object? Then say whether he has not seen her under the most favourable point of view—as his deliverer from punishment—as one interested in his fate. Go, go; the marriage is settled; you will have the bravest man in Persia for your son-in-law; and believe me, before we have seen six moons pass over our heads, he will become the Shah's favourite."

The chief executioner was slow in comprehending all that he had just heard. He was quick at a straightforward blow, but tardy in unravelling a tortuous intrigue. He shook his head, and said, "Wonderful *shaitan* art thou, O man of wit! but, with all thy understanding, tell me with what face am I to appear before the Shah—I who have not obeyed his commands? For the youth's mind is not changed;

he gave no consent to the marriage. How then can I tell the Shah that I did not obey because the cause for punishment no longer existed?"

"Leave that to me," said the Humpback. "Have you ever heard of a physician giving rise to a disorder, without having the medicine at hand to cure it? We do not walk without shoes, when we have a flinty road to travel over. Go, make your mind easy. The Shah is a fox, 'tis true, but I am the father of foxes. But one word in your ear. You must say that the youth did consent; in truth he said words to that extent. Did not he say to your daughter, that he was her slave—that she might do with him what she pleased? What do you want more?"

The chief executioner opened his eyes at hearing these words; and said, in a tone of amazement, "Is it so?" Then shaking his head, he continued, "You are a wonderful *shaitan*! All that I heard the youth say was mere *chum wa hum*, or palaver. To consent in truth and reality is one thing—to bandy fine words is another; however, if you can swear that he did

consent, there is no harm in that. I will swear too; and then, if he still refuses, we can only come to the bastinado again after all."

"Now, in God's name! order your horse," said the Humpback; "let us go straight to the Shah, and report to him what we have done. Recollect, we say that he did consent; that, after having seen the whole apparatus of punishment in readiness, fright took possession of his soul, and that he said, whatever the Shah pleases, he was ready to do. But, open your eyes! not a word of Zulma's appearing. Order your *naib* to suppress that part of the business. But it does not signify. Let people say what they please, we have a wit of our own, and the Shah's ear is in our hand; so nothing can come of it to us but good."

Upon this they repaired to the palace, and were admitted to the Shah's presence, where we shall for the present leave them.

CHAPTER II.

Geese in a basket and gossips in a harem !

SAYING IN MAZANDERAN.

WHEN Zohrab was summoned to appear before the Nasakchi Bashi, his youthful servant Ali was in attendance upon him, and witnessed the whole transaction. Sensibly alive to his master's forlorn situation, and withal possessing the curiosity natural to his age, he was always on the watch, eagerly attentive to everything which related to his well-being. Upon the present occasion, as soon as he saw the chief executioner's lieutenant, a personage universally dreaded, and when he had ascertained the nature of his visit, fear at first took possession of his faculties, and almost deprived him of the power of doing aught else than keeping a fixed and earnest attention to everything that

was passing before him. As soon as his master was led away, he followed the procession at a cautious distance, and having crept unobserved into the court, the intended scene of punishment, he took his station sufficiently near to hear and see. In the mean while, fifty schemes in favour of his master's release were revolving in his mind. First he determined to apply to one person, then to another, but all his results terminated in seeking the protection of the Lady Amima,—for she, and she only, he felt conscious, would protect the cause of the innocent and oppressed. When he heard the proposal of marriage made to his master, with all its brilliant advantages and pleasures described, he sided with the maker of it; and his mind was soon at ease that all would go well, that his master must agree to so charming an arrangement, and that of course he would rather marry than undergo the horrid alternative of a bastinado;—but when he heard his master's answer, so fully did he revere his words, that, catching his indignation, he would have flown at those who dared propose any thing so unbe-

fitting. And then, as soon as he saw the immediate consequences, the attack commenced, the violence offered, and the fearful odds against his safety, he could wait no longer, but straightway took his departure before he could ascertain the result, and without looking back, made at once for the gate of the royal harem, and enquired with the utmost precipitation for his mother, who he knew was there in attendance. He was allowed to see her, and then, breathless and distressed, he related the danger to which his master was exposed, and demanded that it should immediately be made known to the Princess. As soon as Mariam had informed her mistress of Ali's application, and that he himself was in attendance, she ordered him to be brought before her, conducted by his mother; and although, according to the strict rules of the harem, boys of his age were prohibited from entering, still she did not hesitate, when there was a case of urgency demanding her interference, to place herself above them.

She was seated in the turret-chamber when Ali was announced, and, not having seen Zohrab

that morning on his terrace, she immediately suspected that something untoward had taken place.

“What has happened, Ali?” said Amima to him with a kind and encouraging accent; “what news have you?”

The boy, in an animated manner, his eyes suffused with tears and his voice tremulous from agitation, said, “I am come to seek your protection for my master: they have seized him; they may have put him to death by this time. In the name of Allah, as you are a mussulman, send some one instantly to stop their blows. It is at the house of the chief executioner that the wretches are striking him.”

Seeing at one glance that no time was to be lost, and suppressing for a moment all curiosity as to the cause of the violence, she immediately drew from under her cushion her kalem-doun and her roll of paper, and wrote a short note to this effect to the Shah.

“My King! my Uncle!

“As you love Allah, and as you would receive that mercy which you show to others,

spare the unfortunate Zohrab Khan. We hear that at this moment he is undergoing the torture of punishment. Let the prayers of your niece be heard in his behalf."

Having rolled it up and sealed it with her seal, she instantly despatched Mariam to her brother, who she knew would put it into the King's own hands; and when that was done, she turned towards Ali, and requested him to give her an account of what had taken place.

The Princess sat in earnest attention, her arms resting on her knees, bending over her seat; the anxious mother was placed in front, whilst the boy, totally unmindful before whom he stood, drew two or three steps nearer than was the proper etiquette, and began at once as follows:—

"My master was seated in his place; I was standing before him, when the deputy of the chief executioner, with the perfection of disrespect, pushed aside the curtain, walked in, and said aloud, 'Bismillah! in the name of Allah, arise and follow me.' My master said nothing; it was evident that his heart was full

of blood: he got up; we left the room. My heart had turned upon itself: I could have drunk the deputy's blood. I followed at a short distance. When we entered the courtyard of the Nasakchi Bashi, there we saw him seated; his ferashes were standing round; the *felek* was there: my master proceeded, and stood before them like a lion. The Nasakchi Bashi said to him many things—this and that, and so and so,—that the Shah had ordered him to marry the Lady Zulma, and if he did not, he would eat more blows than there were leaves on the trees. By your soul! you ought to have seen my master, and to have heard his words. His eyes became as large as the palm of my hand, and flashed like sparks from a flint. He tore the executioners with his words. ‘What news is this,’ said he, ‘ye cowards? I won’t marry your daughter:—tear me to pieces—do what you like—I will not marry her. I am no one’s slave,’ said he; ‘my king is my father,’ said he. Many many more things said he, until they all stroked their beards, and cried ‘*Allah, Allah il Allah!*’ there

is but one Allah !' After this the Nasakchi Bashi and the King's Humpback, who had each put their finger in their mouths and said 'Allah, Allah !' became ashamed of themselves, and in their turn began to give my master his full share of abuse : they called the ferashes to seize him : two sprang forward ; he threw them before him as if they had been water-melons. Rustam never performed such a feat. In truth, my heart was in my mouth ; such a lion I never even dreamt of : all were in amazement ; all feared to approach him. At length the Nasakchi Bashi and the Humpback, roaring out together, 'Seize, bind and kill !' all the ferashes rushed on him at once. I then thought I saw him overpowered. I could stand the sight no longer ; my heart turned back upon me, and I fled to you for succour. What more shall I say ?" Here the boy's feelings got the better of him, and his excited state melted away before a violent flood of tears which came to his relief.

Amima in the mean while became also visibly affected ; she had caught the whole of the boy's

agitation, and her mind became almost as powerfully excited as his. She would have flown to the aid of the unprotected youth, and interposed her own person to the violence about to be offered to him, had she been able. The interest which he had before excited in her breast became double. She had a secret conviction that the steadiness of his refusal to marry the chief executioner's daughter, might in some manner be caused by his feelings for her. She became perplexed what to do. To interest herself too strongly in his favour might excite suspicions hurtful to both; not to step in for his protection when he was left thus totally at the mercy of heartless, cruel men, would be base. All she could do in the present state of the case, was to await patiently the answer which she hoped to receive from the Shah to her note. She continued to ask more questions from Ali, the subject being one about which she could never tire, until Mariam returned to her, with the assurance that ere long she would receive some communication from the Shah. In fact, very soon after, the eunuch in attendance came

to say that the Humpback was arrived on the part of the King, and waited to be admitted.

The Princess had no sooner granted his admittance, than he appeared. Obsequiousness to those in authority was one of his leading characteristics, and considering the influence which the Lady Amima had over the Shah, it may be supposed that the respect which he paid to her almost amounted to adoration. He was aware how much she despised him, and in his heart he could have destroyed her, her confidant Mariam, and Mariam's brother Sadek, with pleasure, but he was obliged to repress his true feelings, and to act as if he were not worthy to hold their shoes.

As soon as he entered, the Princess pointed to a distant place on the *nummud* for him to sit upon, which he did after numerous contortions of the body, huddling of clothes over his feet, and other signs of humility, as practised by an inferior before a superior.

“What may be the commands of the Shah to his servant?” said Amima.

Making up his hideous features into his best

smile, then touching the ground with his hand, bringing it up to his mouth to kiss, whilst bowing low, he said, "As I am your slave, as I kiss your threshold, the asylum of the universe has ordered me to represent to my Lady Banou that her note has been understood, and that the Shah says, 'Upon my eyes be it! Even as you wish, so it is.'"

"How?" said Amima, with great animation of look and manner.

"Whatever you have commanded, so it is; Zohrab Khan has not been molested; his heart's wishes are put in order."

"Explain your meaning," said the overjoyed Princess. "My object was to protect the oppressed. We heard that punishment was about to be inflicted upon an inexperienced youth, and our heart was afraid that the Shah had been wrongly advised."

"Our Banou has the soul of an angel," said the Humpback: "the Shah's subjects are her slaves; wherever there be tears and groans, there she is ever at hand to relieve them. Heaven—the highest and choicest heaven—

must be her destiny hereafter. The Christians may talk of their blessed Mariamne, upon whom be blessings, but what is she to our Banou? 'Tis true, the Shah in his wisdom punishes the disobedient, as in right he ought, but when supplication comes before him in the shape of such beauty and loveliness as our Lady of Irân — his blessed niece, — then the strong gates of justice give way, and soft compassion walks in."

"But say," said Amima, "was my interference in the hostage's favour sufficiently in time to prevent the violence which was about overwhelming him?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said the Humpback, "there was no need of violence! Wisdom had entered into his soul before we came to extremities; at the sight of danger his heart lost its valour; a look over the precipice made him retreat to the safe footing of prudence."

At these words, the boy Ali's features were agitated, and he would have spoken in defence of what he had before asserted, had not a look from the Princess awed him into silence.

“Then what has been the result?” said Amima, with a half faltering, half determined accent.

“The result-is,” said the man of intrigue, “that Zohrab Khan has agreed to receive the maiden Zulma from the Shah as his wife, and that he will henceforward be numbered among the most favoured servants of Persia, as he already is its most distinguished ornament.”

Upon saying these words, the scrutinizing Humpback fixed his eyes upon the expressive face of the Princess, which by the various feelings it exhibited after what she had just heard, showed that a deeper interest than compassion was involved in her interference in favour of Zohrab. She could scarcely rally her spirits, and a long pause ensued ere a word was said. Then, suddenly recollecting who was seated before her, she said, with as much indifference as she could throw into her manner,

“I am grateful to the Shah for this intelligence. Thanks to Allah, that there have been no blows! It is for the glory of the Shah, that he should as seldom as possible have recourse

to violence. You are dismissed," said she to the Humpback ; " lay our respects at the foot of the throne."

At this, the intriguing barber made his most obsequious though most hypocritical obeisance, and took his leave ; the boy Ali and his mother at the same time were dismissed, and the disconsolate, dejected Amima remained alone. She took herself to task for allowing her mind to be so much affected at what she had just heard ; the more she endeavoured to persuade herself to be indifferent to the future destinies of Zohrab, and to his marriage with Zulma, the more sadness and grief seemed to take possession of her. She found that she had acquired a habit of associating every emotion of her heart, and every scheme for her future life, with Zohrab. This, she felt, must now be destroyed ; she looked upon her passage through life as a walk through a wilderness, or as an excursion through a cloud, without interest, without any thing to mark her way ; as a toil, uncheered by variety, unsupported by any of the best affections of the heart.

Mariam, who watched her mistress with almost the tenderness and assiduity of an elder sister, had for some time observed the abstracted state of her mind, and how totally it was absorbed by one thought. Still Amima took an interest in all that was going on, for hope formed the basis of her thoughts, and she imagined that some happy event might bring about that which her heart so much desired. But after the intelligence she had just received, a numbness appeared to have spread itself over her faculties, and she was dead to every kind of interest. The Humpback and the chief executioner gave themselves infinite pains to have it reported throughout the city, that the celebrated hostage, who was destined to enjoy the future favour of the Shah, was to be united to the beautiful Zulma; and as the news was in everybody's mouth, so it did not cease to be repeated and believed by every woman in the royal harem, and consequently became the subject which was sure to be the most canvassed and repeated in the presence of the unhappy Amima. Mariam was the only one among her

women who never spoke of it to her mistress. She had that nicety of tact, peculiar to women, only to be learnt in courts, of avoiding, without appearing to do so, the one subject to be avoided. But whenever some of the less refined attendants of the harem appeared before their mistress, and which, according to certain daily etiquette, they were obliged to do, then indeed she underwent torture.

“As I am your sacrifice,” said the lady *Arzbeği*, the lady of requests, upon seeing the Princess as soon as the marriage was publicly announced, “the fortunes of that father of *shaitans*, the needy Mazanderani, must be well on the rise to carry off such a wife from under the noses of so many of the great men about court, who were all pulling each other’s beards to get her.”

“Our Princess knows,” said the female tent-pitcher in chief, “that if he be the father of *shaitans*, she is the mother;—wonderful things are said of her. She herself superintends a *bastinado*;—*aje b zering est*—she is activity itself!”

“ It is said of her,” added another, “ that she has the intelligence of a Vizir ; that she directs the whole of her father’s house, and even superintends the stables.”

“ She knows the age of a camel better than a camel-driver,” said the lady moonshee, “ and will tell the *mirakhor** when and where he ought to bleed a sick horse better than the farrier.”

“ A rare wife she will be, at that rate,” said the deputy moonshee, “ for a lord of the sword, as her husband is reputed to be !”

“ Long live the Shah, and God give long life to the bride and bridegroom !” exclaimed old Leila, turning up her eyes ; “ provided we possess our Princess — what is every thing else to us, provided she be happy !”

“ Amen !” said all the women in chorus, headed by Mariam ; “ amen !”

This exclamation roused the lovely Amima from a fit of absence in which she had indulged during the gossip which she had allowed her

* *Mirakhor*, master of the horse.

women to carry on, and made her reflect how little inclined she was to add her amen to those which she had just heard. “ Ah,” thought she, suppressing a deep sigh, “ what wish can I have to live?—indeed, what other wish ought I to have, but that it might please God to take me from this world now that I have nothing in it worth living for?”

But she was destined to undergo a still stronger trial of forbearance. Seated as she was, with her court around her, two strange women were seen walking up the avenue leading to her dewan khaneh, headed by one of the ladies of the ceremonies, making their prostrations according to the prescribed etiquette. The lady of the ceremonies then, depositing her staff of office on the ground as she made her bow, said aloud—“ We represent to our Lady Banou, that the wife of the Nasakchi Bashi of the king of kings, with her daughter, Zulma Begum, request to be allowed to approach and to kiss the threshold of your royal presence.”

This was an unexpected visit: for although

it was frequent for the wives of the noblemen and principal officers of the court to pay their respects at the noon day selam to the Banou of the harem, in the same manner as performed before the Shah, at this particular moment it became a trial of equanimity for the forlorn Amima, almost too great for her to bear. She had never seen the far-famed Zulma, and so far she excited her utmost curiosity; for where was ever a woman who was not curious to scan the beauty of a rival? but to talk to her, to congratulate her, in honour of the Shah's commands, as she knew she must, on her approaching marriage, was a task to which she felt herself unequal, without committing herself in the attempt.

Upon hearing the announcing speech of the lady of the ceremonies, and seeing their humble prostrations, Amima was obliged to say, "*Khosh Amedeed*, you are welcome," with the best voice she could; and after having taken a scrutinizing glance at the face and person of her rival, she proceeded through the usual string of phrases by way of composing herself into a

state of indifference. “You are welcome,” said she; “you have done us honour. You have no illness, I hope? Is your brain in right order? Are your spirits wound up?”

To all these words they answered the prescribed—“May your shadow never be less!—from the benefits of your condescension, we are quite well;—owing to your friendship, our brains are entire;—owing to your compassion, our spirits are quite in order.”

A long pause took place after this, when the lady of the ceremonies thought it right to explain the object of the visit. “The Khanum,” said she, pointing to the chief executioner’s wife, “by order of the king of kings, is come to kiss our Princess’s feet, to show her the gratitude of her soul for all the interest she has taken in the fate of the less than the least—her daughter, who, Mashallah, praise be to God! is to marry the noble hostage, Zohrab Khan.”

“Yes, yes,” exclaimed the chief executioner’s wife, who, luckily for Amima, was one of those prating, verbose women, who would chatter for an hour without leaving one intelligible

impression of what she would say upon her hearer. “ Yes, yes, we are your servants ; we are your slaves. The Shah is full of condescension towards us, and towards my Khan. May the holy prophet take him into his holy keeping ! Praise be to Allah, all that we want we have from the king’s bounty ! If we have salt, ’tis his ; if a home, if clothing, if a bit of bread, if life, if breath, ’tis his—all that we have is his. See this child (pointing to her daughter)—I am the mother who bore her ; I, from a little thing, have brought her up—she is nothing of herself, but from the condescension of the Shah and the Princess, praise be to God ! she will be something. She has a personable appearance, ’tis true, that she has. I say nothing—I am her mother ; if she has beauty ’tis owing to the shadow thrown over us by the Princess ;—if she can talk, if she is accomplished, who gave it her but the compassion and approving nod of the asylum of the universe ? We are come to seize the hem of your garment—to kiss your knee—to ask your protection. We are people of nothing :—we

are servants of the king. Excepting the king and the princess, what is there but dust in the world?—we are some of that dust. The King ordered us to come; the Khan, that less than the least, my husband, the chief executioner, your highness's servant, told me—‘Go, take your daughter—go, worship our princess—go, kiss the threshold which leads to her presence.’ We are come—we want nothing but your condescension.”

To all this Amima occasionally let fall a faint “*Khoob*, well—*belli*, yes!” whilst the haughty Zulma, by a certain impertinent turn of her head, would fain show how much she wished her mother to stop the flow of her vapid compliments, in order that she herself might say something; but the more she attempted to open her lips, so much more did her mother shout on, filling the court with the reverberating sounds of her chatter.

When, after a little pause, Amima said the words—“We are grateful,” they only acted as a theme for the babbler to go off again.

“Grateful!—our princess says she is grate-

ful ! Grateful ! what may be the meaning of that from such lips ? and for what ?—because two of her slaves came to do their bounden duty ? Let her tell us to become martyrs for her—to spill our blood for her—to cut our tongues for her—(here Zulma was seen to smile, whilst several other women did the same)—and then indeed we may call ourselves grateful for being thought worthy of such a privilege;—but our princess—that she should be grateful ! *astafferallah*, heaven forbid !”

Zulma began now to be very impatient, and seeing that there was no chance of saying a word if her mother was not stopped, gave a hint to that effect to the lady of the ceremonies, who, accustomed to the indiscretions of untimely speech, said to her—“The Princess commands silence;” upon which the good lady became silent, although, like wind oozing from a cracked though inflated bladder, sounds indicating coming words, would seem constantly to be craving for exit from her mouth.

Zulma then said, with the proper expressions of respect, though with a certain arrogance of

manner which was peculiar to her, that the Shah had graciously commanded that a public wedding should take place to celebrate her marriage with Zohrab Khan, and had ordered that this should be represented to the lady Amima, in order that she might direct and superintend the whole ceremonial—the dresses, the presents, and the entertainments.

The oppressed Amima, who had hoped that after this interview was over she might be left to herself, and never more be applied to on the subject, heard with dismay the prominent part which it was intended that she should take. She shrank from the undertaking; the very apprehension of the nauseous rejoicings of which it was intended that she should be the promoter, sickened her to the heart, and she looked upon any misfortune, however great, as preferable. But what could she say? Already she showed sufficiently by the agitation and embarrassment of her manner, how much more interested she was than she ought to be upon a subject of an indifferent nature; and to refuse an office so evidently complimentary would

excite suspicions in the breast of the Shah, and indeed in that of every other person, which would be in the highest degree dangerous. She therefore gave her assent in the best manner she was able to Zulma's request, and in addition to the words which implied her assent, she added, "*Inshallah, mubarek bashed* ; — and, please Allah, may the marriage be fortunate !"

Upon this, the garrulous mother again broke forth, "Certainly, most certainly it will be fortunate, if our princess wishes it. She has only to stretch out her hand, and certainly happiness will step forth, with its head up, and its cap on one side."

The prater would have gone on for ever, had not Mariam stepped in to her mistress's help. She had perceived in how painful a situation she was placed, and how much her mind had been harassed by the unexpected visit from Zulma and her mother, and particularly by the import of the message of which they were the bearers. She therefore soon contrived to stop all further speeches from the mother, and assuming a tone of authority which was foreign

to the gentleness of Amima's nature, she at once broke up the assembly, and said aloud, "Our lady has ordered that you should be dismissed. You are dismissed;" and immediately the necessary prostrations were made by all present, and every one departed, not, however, without a look full of scorn from Zulma to Mariam, which seemed to ask, who had armed her with that tone of authority?

When Amima was at length left to herself, she called to her attendant, and said, "I am indeed grateful to you for having broken up the *selam*. I am quite dead with that old person's flattery. Can nothing be done to stop such odious forms of speech?—And this wedding too! Ah! ah!" added she, sighing deeply, "who would have thought that our ill-fated adventure in the Sawachi pass would have entailed such misery upon us! It was a bad hour when we bent our steps thither!"

"In truth it was," said Mariam; "but *Allah kereem*, God is merciful! who can withstand destiny?"

"One thing I have resolved," said Amima,

with a sort of false resolution on her lips, “which is, that I never will go into that turret again. By the aid of the Prophet, that is at an end. Order it to be closed, my soul Mariam ! let the world go on as it likes, I will none of it.”

Mariam did not feel it right to resist this order, for she easily perceived what was the state of her mistress’s feelings. It was too plain what an effect the certainty which now existed in her mind of Zohrab’s marriage, had already produced even upon her appearance. There was a flush upon her cheek, a tremor in her frame, and a wildness in her eye, which indicated the most violent inward emotion repressed by apparent calm. Her faithful attendant would have spoken, and would have entreated her, as she valued her life, to give full vent to her feelings, but she feared to show her how much she had committed herself, and was willing to leave her mind to the effect of quiet and the absence of excitement. Accordingly, she respectfully withdrew. When the sensitive maiden was left entirely alone, she

then gave vent to her feelings, and a copious flood of tears came to her relief. Prayer to God, which gives relief to the Mahomedan as well as to the Christian (for God, the true God, is still at the bottom of every heart) gave a softened turn to the blasting disappointment with which she had been assailed; and she most fervently consoled herself by mental devotion, and by an entire resignation to the decrees of Divine Providence. So far, indeed, the injunctions of her Prophet came greatly to her aid, for who that has ever witnessed the extraordinary composure of a Mahomedan in adversity, equal to that produced by the firmest stoicism of antiquity, must not feel aware of the peculiar support which his belief in predestination affords him in the hour of trial? Amima now turned over in her mind all that had taken place during that morning, as calmly as she could. It was difficult for her to make the idea which she had formed of Zohrab's character accord with his present conduct. She dwelt upon their first meeting, and the subsequent consistency of his spirited behaviour. She

then blamed herself for having attacked too endearing a signification to those night watchings on the terrace, which she had flattered herself were the effects of a mutual attachment ; but to unite himself to such a woman as Zulma, was more than she thought one so superior could ever have resolved to do ! From this time forward her character seemed to be changed : grief took possession of her heart, and preyed upon her tender frame ; and the frequent calls she had to oppose these feelings, only served to increase the evils which assailed her.

CHAPTER III.

Good news, though from a fool's mouth, is still good news.

PERSIAN PROVERB.

WHEN Zohrab returned to his confinement, after the indignities which he had received at the hands of the Nasakchi Bashi, his irritation and excitement may be more easily conceived than described. He had been treated like a common malefactor for no crime, and had been saved from actual punishment at the sacrifice of receiving a benefit from one with whom he wished to have no dealings, and being forced as it were into acknowledgments which might be brought up against him to his prejudice. And he was the more averse to the advances which had been made, because they came at a moment of all others when most likely to be resisted, namely, when he had

wound himself up to the highest point of love and adoration for the resistless though prohibited Amima. In the comparison which he constantly made in his mind, of her excellence with the character of those by whom she was surrounded, she rose so superior in his estimation, that he scarcely thought himself worthy of the blessing he enjoyed of looking even from a distance at the building which contained her ; and the adoration which he mentally paid to the turret, might be in some measure compared to that which the Christians of Georgia pay to those churches and sanctuaries which are built on the highest pinnacles of their mountains, and to which they kneel when they perceive them, even at the greatest distance.

He had scarcely seated himself, ere he was visited by one whom he had never before seen, and whose person exhibited a great ostentation of dress. He was heard at a distance by the rustling of his silken vest ; nothing was equal to the gloss and the adjustment of his cap, or to the bewitching tie of his shawl. The tip of every finger was enamelled with a red dye.

Every hair in his beard was curled and set with mathematical precision ; and when he spoke, his lips, fringed with the perfection of a moustache, opened ever and anon a battery of brilliant teeth, which launched with double force (at least in his own conceit) every word that passed through them upon the admiring hearer. This personage was followed by an effeminate-looking servant, who might have passed for a woman, dressed almost as gaily as himself, who occasionally presented to him a beautiful gold and crystal kalioun, which he smoked with astonishing dexterity and affectation, taking only a lengthened whiff, which by a small action of his head he managed to throw over his beard, as also to perfume his person.

Zohrab received him with civil speeches, and invited him to sit, which he did without much pressing, taking an inferior place, and one which Zohrab thought did not accord with the pretensions of his appearance.

“ I am come,” said the stranger, “ to present myself to your service, and ask after the state of your well-being.”

“ I am grateful,” answered Zohrab ; “ is there any thing I can do to serve you ?”

“ I am your servant,” said the other, “ I am the servant of your family. You do not know me, but Mashallah ! praises to Allah, it is a long while since I have known you. The air of Irân is filled with your renown ; I am come from Mazanderan, and there, by the beard of the Shah I swear, you are worshipped.”

“ You come from Mazanderan ?” said Zohrab ; “ from what part of it, in the name of Allah ?”

“ Yes,” said the visiter, with a consequential tone, “ I have done service for you. I have seen those who love you, those who pray for you, those who cry day and night for you, who eternally are repeating, ‘ His place has long been vacant.’ ”

“ Is it so indeed ?” said his hearer, with some interest in his manner.

“ By your head it is so,” answered the other, “ I am just come from Asterabad ; I am Shir Khan Beg.”

The vain Persian expected at these words that Zohrab would start with surprise, presuming that such a person must be known to all the

world ; but the hostage, just recollecting that his name had been mentioned in the letter which he had received from his father, then said, “ You are welcome, we have thanks to give you ; you saw my parents and brought me a letter lately ; may your house prosper ! ”

Shir Khan Beg was delighted to receive any compliments, however small, although he always expected a full return for those which he was constantly making ; and then finding that he had made good his acquaintance with the object of his visit, he curled up his moustache, smoothed down his beard, and cast a look of self-complacence over his person !

“ You saw my father then,” said Zohrab, with the greatest interest beaming in his looks ; “ how was he ? did he appear in spirits ? And my uncle too, did you see him ? ”

“ Praise be to Allah ! ” said Shir Khan, “ there is none like unto your Aga in the world ; active, open-eyed, a full-done man ; the master of deep thought. He showed me marvellous friendship ; he treated me as his son. Your uncle too, he was wonderfully pleased with me. He said things, oh ! many things to me. I also am

not without wit ; I also said many things to them. There is not a person now in Asterabad who does not know Shir Khan Beg—I—I—I—”

The self-sufficient Beg would have gone on in this strain, had not Zohrab mildly reminded him that he required some information concerning his parent's well-being, and not comments upon his own merits. “ I wanted to know whether my father and uncle are in good health,” said he.

“ Their health was excellent,” said Shir Khan, “ and I also was in fine spirits. They sent me a supper, consisting of trays heaped up with such good things ! such fruit !—O Prophet ! where are the apples of Mazanderan, and the fish too, the *shah-mahi** from the *Culzum*, the Caspian ?”

“ But how did you manage to get into the fort ?” said Zohrab, gently stopping his digression. “ Those Turcomans are in general very lynxes at watching the approach of strangers, and I know they never will hold converse with any one except he keep without the wall.”

“ You do not know Shir Khan,” exclaimed

* *Shah-mahi*, or the king fish, a species of herring found in the Caspian.

the Persian, stroking his beard, and pressing down his girdle over his hips. "I am not without my bit of courage; whatever they said, whatever prohibitions they made, whatever guns they pointed at me, whatever was done, nothing prevented my approach. I threw myself forward on my horse—*hi!* I galloped—*hi!* I roared—in truth, on that day I was a lion—until at length I reached the city gate. I saw a cow's beard looking over the turret wall, and a Turcoman attached to it—let an Irâni alone—he asked me what I wanted? By your head! by the soul of your father! by the salt of Aga Mohamed Shah!—I so laughed at his beard, that before a minute was over he was walking round and round my little finger; and before another minute was over, the gates were opened to me, and 'Bismillah' was said to me by a thousand voices."

Zohrab, who was anxious to ascertain, directly or indirectly, what might be his father's real intentions concerning his future conduct towards the Shah, allowed the Beg to have his full talk, and only stopped him when he swerved

too far from the path of his narrative. He then said to him, "You did great things indeed, but did you at once enter into the heart of the city? The people of Asterabad seldom do business in that way."

"No!" said Shir Khan, "at your service be it: they kept me at the gate, and there, even there, we had our *gúftigú*, or negotiation. I, on the part of the Shah, my master; your honoured father, your honoured uncle, and two or three heavy Turcoman white beards, or elders, on the part of the rebels. I said such things!—on the part of the king of kings, I said, 'I am come in order that you may know that at length your rebellion must cease. The marrow of your rebellion has been scooped out by the hand of fortune, and placed into the blessed mouth of the asylum of the universe. Zohrab is in his possession!' by your soul, I said so. 'The lion is chained, and is piquetted before the exalted gate. Sheath your swords,—uncover your heads—stretch out your necks—kiss the earth—come before the king—seize his skirt, and cry *aman*,* for nothing more is

* *Aman*,—mercy, pity.

left for you. Eat no more abomination. Cease your short-sighted endeavours to be free. I, who am your friend, I say so!’ upon which I produced the Shah’s firman, and at my words all the wind immediately fled from their heads, they became less than the least, and they sat with their fingers in their mouths. By your soul, I do not lie. I, who am Shir Khan, I say the truth. Go and ask your father; ask of your own father and uncle, and they will tell you that I am not a man to disguise the truth.”

“Well!” said Zohrab, greatly amused with the vapourings of his visiter, “what did they say in answer? Did not they say things?”

“What had they to say?” replied Shir Khan Beg with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders. “They looked at each other—they looked at me. My words, which in truth were like arrows, remained without an answer, and all they said showed them to be in a state of suspense, and with their heads going round and round. At length they said ‘*Be cheshm*, by our eyes!’ and it was agreed that they should proceed to the foot of the throne. By your soul, it is so!”

“Is it so indeed?” said Zohrab. “Are you sure that my father is on his road hither?”

“I will take my oath upon the Koran,” answered Shir Khan, “that he is; but there is no need for that, since I say it—of what use is an oath, when a word is enough!”

“When is he likely to be here?” inquired the hostage.

“Now, even now!” said the other; “his *peish-khaneh*, his preparatory servants, they say, are already arrived.”

This information excited Zohrab’s attention to an intense degree. He had scarcely allowed himself to indulge in the hope that he should actually see his father; and had laid no plan hitherto as connected with that event; but now he felt it urgent that he should immediately determine what would be his best line of conduct; and at one glance he saw that it was now as much his duty to bend to circumstances, and to conciliate, in order to prepare for his father as friendly a reception as possible, as before he had thought it right to act independently of all considerations, save his own honour and well-being.

“Do you know,” said Zohrab to his visiter, “of whom the embassy consists?”

“It is said,” answered Shir Khan, “that your honoured father is the chief, accompanied by your uncle Mustafa, and the two Turcoman white beards. I know thus much—I—I——”

“Where are they to be lodged?” said Zohrab.

“Some say that their suite, which is large, is to be quartered at the village of hostages, in the neighbourhood, whilst the chiefs will take up their abode with the Grand Vizir, and be his guests. Others say that the Shah has ordered the chief of the camel artillery, the Zamburekchi Bashi, to clear out his house and premises for them, and to lodge them there altogether;” and here, lowering his voice to a tone of humility, and throwing a softened expression into his features, like one about to ask a favour, whilst he drew himself together into as small a compass as possible, he said, “and in truth, O Khan! it was upon that subject that I ventured to come before you, for I have a supplication to make. It is now plain to all the world, that whatever

has happened, has happened and is gone by, but that for the future you, Mashallah ! are to be the elect of fortune. The Shah has vowed that you are to be the greatest man who sits in his gate ; see, he gives to you in marriage the choicest maiden of Irân ; that flower, of which others have not dared even to catch a distant scent, has been at once plucked and thrown into your bosom. The sword of the Rustams and the Afrasiabs is to be placed in your hands, and you are to be the champion of our country. In short, it is plain, that your word is to be law, and your wishes are to be commands. Now, my humble supplication is this—As for me, now you know me, I do not wish to praise myself, but this I will say, that in truth among the youth who ply at the Shah's stirrup, I am not one of the least. Thanks be to God ! I am not without thought. I am neither without words. I have a tongue, which all acknowledge has not its equal. I am master of *chum wa hum* in all its branches. I am not one of those Turks who sit upright on their heels waiting for words. My wit presses on like

my courage in a field of battle. It is always impelling me on. The Shah himself agrees to this. Do not believe me to be such an ass as not to be able to transact the Shah's business."

"Astafferallah, God forbid!" exclaimed Zohrab, who, lost in his own thoughts, had allowed his garrulous visiter to proceed uncontrolled, but who now, wishing to bring him to the point of his application, said, "But you wished to ask something of me. What is it?"

"It is this," said Shir Khan: "since, by the blessing of Allah, your honoured father is speedily to arrive; since I have already been to Asterabad, and am acquainted with the negotiation hitherto carried on with the rebels there; and since your wishes are to be now attended to—my desire would be to be appointed *Mehmandar** to the embassy. Wallah, billah!" exclaimed he, "I have no wish but to be of use to you, and to return to your father here all the friendship he showed me at Asterabad."

Zohrab could not refrain from smiling at this

* *Mehmandar*, an officer appointed to attend upon strangers of consequence.

request. He immediately stated how very unlikely it was that he who had but just escaped from every indignity and ill-treatment at the hands of the Shah, should all at once be elevated to the power and authority which was contemplated by the Beg, and that, prisoner as he was, he felt that he himself was dependant upon the kindness and indulgence of others, instead of being a patron and a protector. "However," said Zohrab, "I see no impossibility in your request. If the Shah wishes to receive the embassy in a friendly manner, I dare say he will appoint such a person to be its Mehmandar as will be agreeable to the ambassador; and as you appear, according to your own account, to be admirably fitted for it, if I should happen to be consulted, believe me, I will not be wanting in forwarding your wishes."

Upon this, Shir Khan Beg, who already looked upon himself as marshalling and controlling the whole of the Asterabad deputation and its affairs, took his leave, several inches taller than when he came.

Zohrab scarcely gave himself time to cast a thought upon the strange character who had just left him, so much engrossed was he by the position which his own affairs had taken. He felt certain now that the false rumour of his having acceded to the Shah's wishes to marry Zulma, must have been spread all over the city, and consequently have reached the ears of Amima. What would he not have given to be able to explain to her in person the situation in which he was placed, to pour out to her the ardour of his love, and to avow his unalterable, firm resolution, never to swerve from his affection ! He abhorred the character of a dissembler ; but still, possessing the knowledge of his father's early arrival, and aware that the success of his schemes might in a great measure depend upon his own conduct at the present moment, he felt that he ought not to appear to set at defiance the Shah's wishes and commands, but wait patiently for an opportunity of consulting by word of mouth with his relations upon the line of conduct which he ought to pursue. Nothing, he was resolved, should ever

make him marry Zulma ; and although his hopes of ever possessing Amima might be totally desperate, still so resolutely did he cling to the soothing thought of living for her alone, that in the ardour of his youthful mind he persuaded himself that that alone ought to satisfy him.

He was in the midst of these thoughts when Ali his servant returned to him from the presence of the Princess. The boy immediately gave a full and distinct account of all that had passed, which only served to heighten his master's perplexities ; for how could he command sufficient patience and forbearance to appear to accede to the Shah's wishes, when the account which he had just received of his Amima's interference in his favour, drove all prudence from his mind, and inflamed him with a redoubled fit of devoted and unalterable love ?

The noon-day prayers were announced from the minarets, when Zohrab was left to his own meditations after the various events of the morning. His mind was tossed to and fro with contending schemes and resolutions ; and the certainty that he would shortly see or hear from

his father, acted as a check upon the formation of any immediate resolution, and damped the natural impetuosity of his own character by the respect and reverence which he felt for his parent.

Still every thought and feeling turned towards Amima; and after he had exhausted his spirits within the walls of his room, he naturally ascended his terrace, wishing to refresh his eyesight, as well as his imagination, by contemplating the spot in which she usually passed her time, and through the medium of which he fondly hoped much and frequent mental communication had taken place between them. But when he looked to the turret, to that well-known spot where he had so long and so frequently feasted his eyes with the form of his beloved, what was his dismay upon seeing it entirely closed, and apparently untenanted! The casements, which before were open to every wind, were shut; and instead of the daylight, which was allowed to pour in on every side, although mitigated by the fretwork of the lattice, nothing but a heavy, closed front, reared its head before the disappointed lover.

This circumstance gave a new turn to his thoughts. The certainty of Amima's displeasure immediately flashed across him, and oh! the pleasing, the long wished-for certainty of her not being indifferent to him! "For," he argued, "there cannot be love without jealousy—it would not be love; and jealousy must exist in the most exalted minds as well as in the lowest; and if Amima, upon hearing the reports of my approaching marriage to Zulma, has blessed my hopes that I am dear to her, by a fit of anger, what can it argue but her disapprobation of that marriage?" At the same time, he gave way to his own feelings, and was almost moved to tears, at the thought that he was perhaps afflicting her noble mind with misgivings as to the rectitude of his conduct. Again did he form schemes for seeing her. Willingly would he have braved every torment to be allowed to speak to her only for one short minute; and in vain he turned over every possibility, until he remained more than ever convinced, that nothing in the world is more impenetrable, or is held more sacred, than the harem of a Mahomedan.

Still ruminating upon the subject, he called to his faithful Ali to give him once more an account of his visit to the Princess.

“Where was she seated? now tell me, Ali,” said his master; “how did she look? what did she say?”

“There, even there in the turret,” said Ali. But when the boy cast his eyes upward and saw the chamber closed, he exclaimed, “O wonderful! ’tis closed! This is strange; for my mother told me that the Lady Banou would never sit in any other spot, nor in any other corner of the room but that which looks hitherward.”

“Perhaps she is sick; perhaps she has left us,” said Zohrab.

“O, sir,” said the boy, “I, even I was there this morning, and she turned her head a great deal this way; she was in good health, and there was no sort of indication of changing her abode; on the contrary, I saw her praying carpet in the corner, ready spread for her devotions after the noonday selam; and why should she not have returned to it?”

“What did she do, Ali, when you told her

of the attack made upon me at the Nasakchi Bashi's ?”

“What shall I say ?” answered the boy: “her face turned a thousand colours, but at length paleness predominated, when we thought she would have fainted. But no ; she calmly wrote a note to the Shah, and not till then would she hear my story.”

Zohrab devoured his servant's words with as much eagerness as if they had been sent to him from the seventh heaven by the angel Gabriel.

“But tell me,” said he, “what did she say when you related all that had befallen me ? What did she say of the appearance of the chief executioner's daughter, and of her interference in my favour ?”

“I beg to represent,” said Ali, “that I left the scene of contention before Zulma appeared, and therefore could say nothing to the Banou upon that subject ; but I told her how stoutly you refused marrying her. I repeated all the abuse you bestowed upon the ferashes, and the manner in which you rebuked the chief executioner.”

“ You did, did you ? ” exclaimed Zohrab eagerly, delighted that his real sentiments should so recently have been conveyed to his beloved. “ You did well ; I am satisfied with you. But what could have closed the turret ? cannot you find out for me, Ali ? Go, inquire of your mother ; perhaps she may tell you ; perhaps you will then discover if the Lady Banou be really sick or not.”

Ali again left his master to his own thoughts and conjectures, watching the turret in the hopes that he might see some indication of an inhabitant ; but in vain. Occasionally it crossed his mind that he was wrong in thus allowing his servant to share his feelings, but trusting to his inexperience, which would prevent him seeing any thing in his inquiries but what flowed naturally from his anxiety upon his own situation, he did not scruple in placing more confidence in him than on another occasion he might be inclined to do.

CHAPTER IV.

Then came the devil in the shape of a woman.

TEMPTATION OF SAINT ANTHONY.

ZOHRA B had passed the day in feverish uncertainty upon his future prospects, and had retired to his apartment, disappointed with watching the closed and disheartening turret. His head was resting on his knees, as he was endeavouring to compose his mind by mental prayer and vows of resignation to the decrees of Providence, when his door was slowly and cautiously opened by a mysterious-looking figure, so covered over and muffled, that he could not discover by the uncertain twilight whether it was man or woman. It stopped some time at the threshold, as if apprehensive of approach-

ing, and then, as if it had ascertained that there was no other person in the room, stepped forward in an uncertain manner. By this time Zohrab had been able to make out that it was not a man, but still, that a woman could have found her way hither, watched and guarded as his dwelling was, appeared to him impossible. The figure was, however, covered over from head to foot with a woman's veil, although it seemed to be put on in a temporary manner; and her general air and gait bespoke her such.

He arose from his seat as she advanced, and in a courteous, though guarded manner, invited her to be seated, which, without more ceremony, she did, carefully wrapping herself round so effectually, that nothing of her person was seen, save part of a small and beautiful hand, which was exposed for the purpose of clasping her veil over her breast.

At length breaking silence, in a woman's voice, she said, "It is plain that Zohrab Khan must be astonished at the visit of a woman: such things are not done in Irân, we know;

but sometimes, when necessity is urgent, women must take the place of men."

"I am grateful," said Zohrab, "for the visit of whoever may be kind enough to notice one so wretched."

"And why so wretched?" said she; "is it not in your own hands to be as happy and as prosperous as the first of those who sit at the King's gate? What words are these?"

"Happiness and good fortune are good or bad by comparison."

"Allow," said the lady, in a rallying tone—"allow that there is no man in Tehran, excepting Zohrab Khan, who would thus be visited by a woman. Will he tell me whether he calls that happiness and good fortune?"

"That is still matter of comparison," said Zohrab: "let me know my visiter, and then I will decide; hitherto, certainly happiness predominates."

"Ah!" said she, "I see you are like all men, although you are said to be superior to them all. You will not be satisfied with happiness in a veiled form."

“ I would willingly seek it in any form,” said Zohrab with a sigh ; “ for I have long been a stranger to it, and am willing to receive it at your hands in any manner you may choose to administer it.”

“ The happiness I would administer,” said the mysterious figure, “ is not of a transient nature, but lasting. It is not the happiness of an hour, or a day ; but of years—of a whole life—Could Zohrab Khan be a customer for such happiness ?”

“ No happiness can be such,” said the youth, unless it be permanent ; to secure that, is the business of every body’s life, although we all go our different ways towards obtaining it. If you can really procure it for me, such as I should wish it, can you ask me whether I will be your customer or not ? In the name of the Prophet, speak on ! describe its quality ; and then name your price.”

“ Hear me,” said the unknown. “ Once upon a time, in the city of Cabul, lived a face-tious mollah, who sat at a corner of the principal gate of the bazaar, and who sold prosperity

by the miscal. His commodity consisted of small bits of paper, upon which were inscribed sentences and prayers from the Koran, and which he sold at so much the miscal. It happened that an Indian merchant, returning to his own country from the pilgrimage at Badkou, stopped to rest at Cabul. Jaded and depressed as he was, the cry of the mollah struck his ear. Prosperity at so easy a rate was not to be withstood, therefore he immediately became a purchaser; he was not satisfied with the smaller portions—he asked for the largest possible quantity. The mollah upon this produced a whole and entire Koran, an old book, which he put into the scales, and, having weighed it, asked a large price for it. The merchant at once delivered up his all, and purchased the book. When he returned to his own city, he exhibited his purchase as the sure secret for obtaining prosperity; but not understanding Arabic, it remained in the corner of his house, whilst he supposed that it was at work for him in some unseen manner. Some of his countrymen were

inclined to laugh at, others to envy him. One night, when the merits of his purchase had been more than usually discussed, he took the book into his hands, and turned over the leaves from beginning to end, hoping to discover something to his advantage; and sure enough between two leaves, which had been stuck together, he found a few lines written in the Nagri character, which he could read; and from them he learnt, that long since, the book had belonged to a Mahomedan merchant of Cashmere, and that, by way of memorandum, he had written that under a certain tree, near a certain place, he had buried ten bags of gold, each containing a thousand double tomauns. Forthwith he departed, went to Cashmere, and there, in truth, he found the treasure in the very spot pointed out in the book. You may guess, after this, the faith which he and his countrymen ever after put in the Koran.—Now,” said she, “it is not necessary to a man of your understanding to point out the drift of my story. If you take me as the Indian did the Khoran, ignorant of my con-

tents, seeing only my outside, I will promise, as did the mollah, that the possession of me will lead to prosperity. After this, what further explanation do you require from me?"

Zohrab, who by this time had almost been fascinated out of his reason by the wit, manner, and voice of his mysterious visiter, (though he had made a good guess who she might be,) and had almost surmounted the disgust which the impropriety of her visit would have given him as well as every other Mahomedan, had he reflected upon it, was about to answer in an unguarded and impassioned manner, when the door of his room was suddenly opened, and Sadek, the Shah's confidential servant, walked in. The lady had been so absorbed in her narrative, and our hero so attentive to her words, that the intruder came upon them quite unawares. As soon as she recognized him, she uttered a faint cry, and darted out of the room as if she had been pursued by an evil demon. Zohrab looked confused, and a faint gleam of displeasure passed over his features at having been so unceremoniously in-

truded upon. Sadek's severe countenance expressed amazement, and he seemed to inquire by his look what might be the meaning of this strange and hurried apparition.

"Mashallah!" said he, in a tone half playful, half ironical, "we did not know that Zohrab Khan's marriage was so near as this. Perhaps I may not be told that my place is empty."

Zohrab, more anxious at this moment to skreen the woman (whoever she might be) from false imputations, than himself, answered in a more serious tone. "Whoever that person may be," said he, "know that she is without evil—I have not even seen her face—she may be a houri or a devil, for aught I know."

"But since you are going to be married," said Sadek, "what harm is there? These things will happen in the strictest harems. After all, a man must communicate with his wife, and not receive her into his house as he would a horse into his stable, given as a present, without inquiring into its good or bad qualities."

“ You may laugh at my beard as long as you like,” returned Zohrab ; “ and very probably you will not receive my words against the testimony of your own eyes ; but of this be assured, that I am not so soon to be married, and that, whether I am or not, the person who has just left the room is as much a stranger to me as she may be to you.”

“ So be it,” said Sadek, “ I do not wish to pry into your secrets ; and therefore, be she wife or be she maid, I can say no more than good luck attend you both. My principal business is not of her ; ’tis of other things : it is to tell you that you may prepare yourself to hear of the arrival of your father at any hour. His equipages and baggage are arrived, and they are accompanied by a most extraordinary personage — a Dervish, about whom I wish to ask you some questions, as he probably is well known to you.”

“ A Dervish !” said Zohrab, in surprise, as if he were prepared to hear of odd things ; “ I never knew one in Mazanderan of any great reputation.”

“ He calls himself the Dervish Hezzarpicheh, and he is really a remarkable man. In person he is tall and powerful, full chested, with strong arms, and large hands. He has a beardless sallow face, with long moustaches; an aquiline nose, and the eyes of the hawk. In dress he is most like an inhabitant of Cashgar; with turbaned head, but wearing a leopard's skin thrown loosely over his back: a large halbert is in his hand, and a profusion of thickly knotted rope is tied in many folds round his waist. A long knife is conspicuous in his girdle, and in his hand he swings a horn suspended by three chains. He professes a total indifference to everything. He cares not when he sleeps, where he sleeps, or whether he sleeps at all. He is equally indifferent to food. He gives himself no trouble to seek it. Unless it be given to him by the charitable, he never gets anything beyond dry bread; and he rejects coffee, tobacco, opium, and every luxury of that description, with disdain. The only thing which he seems to care about is his rope; and that, as he mutters strange sounds and sen-

tences, he is always twisting and tying over his body. Contempt of the world and mankind is the burthen of his discourse. He preaches contentment and resignation. All men are equal in his eyes. He gives the first place to the beggar, and sits before the king. In putting forth his doctrine, he expresses himself with the greatest energy, oftentimes with considerable eloquence, and generally with much originality. With all this he is mindful of everything around him, particularly of the relative position of things and places; asks questions upon subjects the most irrelevant; marks and notes the names and histories of every body; pretends to be acquainted with the stars, and gives recipes and talismans for the ills of the mind. If he is reviled and upbraided, he calls for death, and invites any one to put him out of the world. When he is questioned concerning the coming embassy, his answers are evasive and in parables. Where he has picked up his moral sayings and his scraps of poetry, nobody can divine. They do not exist in any known books; and if they be

of his own invention, what sage is there of our day who can stand before him? Some of his sayings have been already reported to the Shah, who is all astonishment and bewildered. A bystander, who was pitying his poverty, as he lay basking in the sun, said, ‘Poor Dervish, why do you choose to be so destitute?’ He exclaimed,

‘Why call me poor, when I have much to give?
Shine but the sun, and ample shade I give;
Shade of my own, and whom none else can give.’

Another asked him, ‘But why this rope? None but a fool would burthen himself with such a thing.’ He immediately answered,

‘Beware of him who laughs at law and rule;
Such perhaps are you; but call not me the fool.
Could but this rope restrain my soul from sin,
I’d tie my heart in thousand folds within.’

In short,” said Sadek, “he has produced a sensation in the city that never was known, even since the days of Saadi. Some say ’tis Saadi returned to earth; others that it must be one of the imans. Whence he really came, what he is here for, and whither he goes, nobody can say.”

“ I never heard of such a person, by the soul of my father !” said Zohrab. “ Does he come from Asterabad with the embassy, or is he in any way attached to it ?”

“ The servants say that they picked him up on the road, and that he issued forth from the mazes of the *Teng shemshir búr*, as they passed it at midnight. He himself will answer no questions as to his own movements, and generally speaks in this manner : ‘ Whence comes the wind ? where goes the wind ? ’tis here, ’tis there ; now it refreshes my breast, now it smoothes my breathing. The wandering Dervish is its companion ; he walks—he goes ; for ever onward will he go, till he reaches his final *menzil* ; and then God’s commiseration be upon him !’ Already are the lame, the blind, the halt, the leprous, surrounding him, looking upon him as one come from heaven, and some are even happy if they can touch the skirt of his robe. The Shah himself is anxious to see him, but he says, ‘ I want not the Shah ; the only benefit he can confer upon me is to dislodge my soul from this ugly tenement of mine.

If he wants me, here he will find me. I am as ready to see kings as beggars.'"

"Wonderful!" said Zohrab. "This must be a holy man, if he be sincere. He is, in truth, a wise man; for what, in fact, have we to do in this world of misery, but to make ourselves ready to go out of it?"

"Hold," said Sadek, "you have got into this desponding state from having been so long in confinement. Hasten to marry; do not let that mysterious unknown languish for you, and you will no longer admire this fanatic Dervish, and will agree with me, that man is made to work out his salvation through the intricate paths of active life, and not through the mire of indolence and sloth."

"Perhaps so," said Zohrab; "but tell me, shall I be able to see my father when he arrives? You know I can decide upon nothing till that takes place; and although I would not wish the Shah to think that I am so unmindful of his good intentions towards me as totally to reject his proposals, yet I may tell you, whom I hope to call my friend, that nothing shall persuade

me to take any step that is not approved of by my father. Therefore I depend upon you to procure the Shah's sanction for my seeing him, as soon as it may be thought expedient."

"Upon my eyes be it!" said Sadek; "but do not expect too much. We are surrounded by enemies. I, in particular, am watched by those who would be too happy to bring on my disgrace and drink my blood; but I promise that, as far as depends upon me, I will do everything to advance your interests and secure your happiness."

Sadek upon this took his departure, leaving our hero at leisure to reflect upon the occurrence which had just taken place. He could not be mistaken as to the mysterious woman; for what maiden in Tehran, saving the executioner's daughter, would ever have ventured to take such a step? Although at the time he had felt displeased at Sadek's unannounced visit, yet now that he could form a better judgment, he blessed his stars that it had so taken place, for he could not hide from himself that he began to feel the power of her fascination. He fortified himself

with resolutions never again to allow of her approaches ; for had she, in addition to the power of her conversation, opened the whole artillery of her charms upon him, he dreaded to think of the frailty which might have betrayed him to act in direct opposition to his principles and his better reason. But now that his father was near at hand, he hoped that his future fate would soon be decided, and that his odious confinement would be terminated in some way or other. As for the Dervish, he thought that he might be acting a part in furtherance of his father's schemes ; but, again, he reflected that so many of these fanatics were to be seen throughout Persia, that his meeting with the embassy might have been purely fortuitous.

Zulma, who, having lost all patience at the slow progress of her wishes, had made up her mind to perform one of those extraordinary and independent feats for which she was so famous, had, as already described, visited Zohrab, having previously ascertained from her place of observation on the terrace that he was then

in his apartment, and being at the same time secure, as she thought, from all interruption. When she found herself foiled by Sadek's visit, she returned to her own home furious at her disappointment. She called down every misfortune on the intruder's head. Every sort of suspicion immediately arose in her mind as to the object of his visit; and with her natural impetuosity, she immediately settled that he was attempting to impede her marriage.

In these feelings she lost no time in sending for the Humpback, who hastened to attend her summons; for he too was anxious to consult with her upon more subjects than the one which exclusively engrossed her.

"Say," said she, as soon as she saw him appear, "where is that good luck for which Zulma has ever been so celebrated? You, who are the owner of acuteness,—you, who pretend to converse with constellations, and know when a planet looks benignly, and when it looks otherwise—tell me why a dog should cross one's path, when nothing but pleasantness ought to await us?"

“What has happened, O my Khanum!” exclaimed the astonished barber at this salutation: “Whose dog has dared to threaten you with pollution?”

Upon this the highly excited maiden related all that had befallen her in her visit to Zohrab. She then launched out against Sadek in the following strain:

“At the very moment when, with that wit for which you know me to be famous, I had turned the head of the youth, and he was about giving up his very soul to me, that dog without a saint, Sadek, came in. What could I do? I fled. See my ill fortune! Whether or not he discovered who I was, that signifies little to me; Zulma to that is indifferent—but tell me why should he visit Zohrab Khan? Every one knows his severe and morose disposition, which prevents him from making friends with any one—he could not have come to him at that hour for friendship alone—he has some object in view, at the bottom of which is that ill-begotten Mariam, the Princess’s woman, his sister—she governs him entirely, and makes

him do whatever she pleases — she can turn him round her little finger, notwithstanding his sour face. Now tell me, Humpback, in your wisdom tell me, do not you think that my suspicions are well-founded, and that I have a host of enemies in that quarter?"

The Goozoo at these words looked at his animated friend through the corner of his eye in the most arch and significant manner, but said not a word.

"Speak, light of my eyes, speak," said Zulma; "by my soul, speak! Have you discovered any thing? By that look, I am sure you have."

The artful barber seemed to enjoy the maiden's anxiety, and only excited it the more by indulging her with one of his best satanic grins. At length he said,

"And so you think to have made a discovery? After this, say that the Goozoo is not a man who sleeps without keeping one corner of his understanding always on the watch, and one corner of his eye always on the look-out! It is some time since it has occurred to him that your suspicions are not without foundation. *Bah!*

bah ! bah !" said he, chuckling as he made his exclamations, " see what the penetration of one head will do. Let me tell you, that it is not Sadek of whom you need be apprehensive, nor Mariam—what are they? they are mere dirt—but your rival is—shall I say it?—it is——"

The over-excited maiden was by this time in a fever of apprehension; and although afraid of pronouncing a name which instinct had almost placed on her tongue, yet at length reddening to the very roots of her hair, she said, with one hand extended, " Is it the Princess?"

" You have said it," answered the Humpback, as if angry at the word having been taken out of his mouth. " Unless I am one of those ungifted asses who do not know the difference between the way in and the way out of their stable, I am certain of this fact, although it has never been hinted at to me by any one of God's creatures."

" How, in the name of Allah, then," said Zulma, " do you know it?"

" How should I but by making deep

thoughts," said the barber—"by putting seven and seven together—by seeing, hearing, coming, going, asking, remaining silent, and by exerting all that talent which none but a Humpback can possess? In the first place, who knows what took place in the open country near the passes of Sawachi, where they met and talked; and, what's more, saw each other face to face? Why does the Princess on all occasions put forth the hand of protection when he is crossing over the plank of danger? Why has she taken up her constant abode in the King's turret which looks upon the dwelling of the hostage? and why, when I told her that he had at length consented to receive you as his wife, did these eyes behold her confusion, her agitation, and the departure of colour from her cheek, as if her soul was about taking leave of her body? You see then that the Goozoo is no ass, and that the wit which God has put into his head does not lie there to rust like a Khorassani blade in a bad scabbard!"

Zulma had paid the utmost attention to all he had said; and then, with a long-drawn sigh,

gave a slow and unwilling assent to his conclusions, as if the weight of Demawend had been placed upon her breast. At length she said, "But do you think that Zohrab has given up his soul to her also?"

"Upon that head I cannot speak with the same certainty. He is known to be constantly upon his terrace, and he has shown much obstinacy in rejecting you; but men have hearts for many wives—they can love often and marry often. Besides, his head must be full of other matters. He is a personage—he has a country which looks up to him—in fine, he is a man, really and truly a man."

These remarks seemed to afford some consolation to Zulma, and increased her desire to try her skill once more to enslave the heart of our hero, which she intended to do upon the very first opportunity. After having laid a scheme for watching the actions of the Princess and her attendants, in order more fully to ascertain how well or ill founded might be their suspicions, they parted.

CHAPTER V.

The wisest man must sometimes change the colour of his beard.

PERSIAN PROVERB.

THE subjection of Mazanderan had long been the object of the Shah's policy, and, anxious to impress his former friend and rival, Zaül Khan, with an idea of his greatness, he determined to receive him with the utmost magnificence. The years which had elapsed since last they met, had left but a slight impression upon their respective minds of each other's person. Upon the frame and countenance of an eunuch, an appearance of premature age settles even from youth, and the changes are not strong as upon the man, whose beard, like the verdant foliage of nature, shows by the variety of its tints through which of the seasons

of his career the owner of it is then passing. The Shah's superior good fortune, his rise from being a wanderer and an adventurer to the possession of a throne, were subjects in his mind of great exultation; and as he thought that success is always the test of merit, although his ostensible creed was that it is the gift of fate, so he longed to exhibit himself to his coming guests in all the splendour and glory with which his good fortune had clothed him.

The Turcomans, upon whom the magnificence of a court would have a salutary effect, had long ceased to appear at Tehran, and upon their minds too he wished to make impressions of his power. Their ideas of wealth and greatness were founded upon the possessions of rural life. He who possessed most sheep, most mares, most horses, and who was at the head of most tents, was in their estimation the greatest personage. The King knew this, therefore he took pains to make great displays of his cavalry, of his finest horses, to dress his horsemen in their best armour, and adorn them with the most brilliant arms; and as they the livers in tents

but very imperfectly knew the use of cannon, he determined also to astonish their minds on that head. With this view, in the centre of the great maidan adjacent to the palace, he stationed a line of artillery, consisting of cannon of various calibre, which had been brought with great labour from the palace of Ispahan, where they had been collected by the Shahs of the Seffi dynasty ; and placed them under the care of a well-dressed corps of gunners.

The avenues to the great hall of audience were lined with dense rows of musqueteers. The hall itself was opened ; its great curtain extended. The marble throne, principally composed of the diaphanous stone of Ta-breez, and sculptured and inscribed in various forms, was prepared for the Shah's reception ; whilst the many fountains in the great court were made to play on the occasion. This hall was looked upon as one of the wonders of Persia, and had been painted and ornamented with a degree of splendour unknown since the time of Shah Seffi, who was supposed to have ex-

hausted all the magnificence and ingenuity of his day, upon the far-famed *Chehel sitoon*, or forty pillars, in his palace at Ispahan. Open in front to every breeze, it was supported by curiously carved pillars, inlaid in their different flutings and compartments with looking glasses. Its sides, divided and subdivided into compartments, were painted in the richest arabesques; on one side was seen a large historical painting, from the hand of the celebrated Ali Murad of Shiraz, in which the King, at the head of his gholams, was seen making a charge against a body of Russians, who, notwithstanding the hollow square in which they were placed, were becoming the victims of their temerity in attempting to make a stand before the impetuosity of the Persians. Its floors were spread with the choicest Herat carpets. The skirtings of the walls were composed of the richest veined Tabreez marbles; and its ceiling was carved in the most beautifully designed meanders and fret-work. The mass of verdure and spouting waters which met the eye, upon looking from

its recesses, made it at once a delightful retreat, as well as a dignified hall for the position of a monarch's throne.

The principal officers of state were stationed at their posts. The chief executioner sat at the principal gate. The great master of ceremonies was seated in the small entrance-room ready to receive and introduce the strangers; and every object of luxury and wealth, which could be placed with advantage to catch the eye, was displayed.

At a fortunate hour before noon-day prayer, the embassy entered the great court of the palace, when the artillery fired a salute, more, it is said, to inspire awe than as a mark of respect. Before the 'Sublime Entrance' were placed two mounds of human heads, by way of mementoes of the Shah's power, which were carefully reported to have been recently sent from some rebel districts on the confines of Georgia.

After having been obliged to wait some considerable time in the room of the master of ceremonies, at length it was announced, that the Shah would receive the embassy.

He was seated on his throne surrounded by a throng of the most brilliantly arrayed courtiers and attendants. He himself was dressed so entirely with jewelry, that, as the sun glanced upon him, the eye could scarcely meet the beautiful and magnificent refulgence. A crown, in the front of which shone conspicuous a diamond of immense size, was placed on his head, whilst a pair of armlets or bazûbends, those distinguishing badges of Persian royalty, also composed of stones of immense value, were distinguished on the upper limb of each arm : here glistened those two famous diamonds the *koh nûr* and the *deriah nûr*, the mountain, and the sea of light, which had been seized by Nadir Shah among the spoils of the Moguls at the siege of Delhi, and upon which the Persians now looked as talismans which gave their possessor a lawful claim upon the throne.

His sword was placed across his knees ; nothing could exceed the richness of its belt and sheath : a resplendent dagger glittered in a girdle of incalculable value ; whilst he was backed

by a pillow, so inlaid with precious stones, that it looked like a work of mosaic. But with all this his appearance was scarcely human ; a dressed skeleton would have filled his place as well ; at best he became a living illustration of the vanity of life. The jewels in which his person was incased, were contrasted with the ghastliness of his features, whilst those same features seemed to destroy the value of the jewelry.

But still how dreaded a king was he to his subjects ! They could not attach ridicule to any thing belonging to one who had gained power and a throne by superiority of intellect, and which he had exercised in elevating their country to great eminence among the nations of Asia. There was something so uncommon in the circumstance of a being, so degraded in his person, raising himself to kingly power, that that circumstance alone gave the character of the marvellous to his appearance, and surrounded him with feelings of awe and mystery, highly conducive to the establishment of his power.

Repeated discharges of artillery took place as the King seated himself on the throne, and

“ the Shah is seated ” rang from mouth to mouth throughout the courts, when a general prostration was made. The kalioun of state, a magnificent bauble resplendent with the most costly jewelry, stood in front of the King elevated on an enamelled pedestal ; youths of the greatest beauty, dressed in every luxury of costume that Persian ingenuity could devise, stood in a row bearing the bow and arrow, the sword, the shield, the battle-axe, two magnificent crowns, and the ewer and basin of state, all resplendent with precious stones ; and when every thing was arranged, the general grouping of the Shah and his brilliant cortège, was equal to the most finished picture ever portrayed, either by painting or imagination, of Oriental magnificence.

The deputation from Asterabad proceeded in stately order through the long avenues and broad courts of the palace, headed by Shir Khan Beg, who had been appointed its *mehmander*, and who took care to exhibit all his airs and attitudes to the surrounding spectators, until it was received by the head master of

ceremonies. He having taken his staff of office in hand, with the greatest solemnity proceeded onwards, the whole assembled company making their stated prostrations, until they stood before the throne, in the court below.

The master of ceremonies then proclaimed with an audible voice, “ that the chiefs of Asterabad and the elders of the Turcomans, having arrived with presents to the King of kings, claimed permission to rub their foreheads against the threshold of his gate, and place themselves at his disposal.” The Shah upon this was just on the point of saying the usual “ *Khosh amedeed*, you are welcome !” when his ferocious eye in an instant flashed unexpected fire, and his whole features assumed an expression of doubt and suspicion. In countries where the blessings of freedom are known, the expression of the King’s face is not scrutinized with the same degree of interest, as it is in those unhappy regions where the contracted brow, the bitten lip, and the indignant attitude, acting like a barometer of public security, tell at once

that danger is gathering in the political horizon. The Shah, looking steadfastly at the chief of the deputation, exclaimed, "Where is Zaul Khan? Who is this man?" Mustafa Khan (for it was Zohrab's uncle, who was prepared with his answer,) exclaimed, "As I am your sacrifice, the hour was not fortunate when Zaul Khan left his house. It is evident that he has been struck with the evil eye; and we, who are the servants of the Prophet, must bow our heads before the decrees of destiny. Although his coming is uncertain, yet he comes; he may be here at any moment. In the mean while, let the Shah receive the prayers of his servants."

All this while the Shah's anger was visibly on the rise. He looked with eyes of suspicion and penetration upon the speaker. They wandered from him towards the Turcoman chiefs, who having lived all their lives in the seclusion of the remote plains of Kipchak, were totally unacquainted with any splendour excepting that which their rude though numerous tents might afford. These simple men were

awed by all that surrounded them; but—when they witnessed the hideous face of the sovereign, looking like their evil genius, their hearts began to quake within them. He scowled at Mustafa Khan with every expression of contempt; and, when he had finished his speech, exclaimed, “Are ye come all this way, O men of nought! to laugh at the Shah’s beard, and to turn his court into a receptacle for a gang of ragamuffins as ye are? Whose dogs are these?” said he, turning towards his Grand Vizir. “What was passing in your head, when you allowed our presence to be polluted by their odious persons?”

The Vizir, in astonishment, answered, “I also am in great amaze. I have been deceived. As I am your sacrifice, certainly every impression was made upon my mind that Zaul Khan was here, and headed the deputation.”

This produced a great sensation, and an anxiety of look and whispering took place throughout the assembled courtiers. No one seemed to be at his ease. Everybody accustomed to the temper of the King knew well

what such expressions of word and look foreboded : less than this had frequently led to instant acts of cruelty and bloodshed ; and had not certain restraints of policy interfered, it is most likely that on the very spot immediate death would have been the fate of those men who had determined to play a deep and desperate game. The sensitive monarch began to feel at every succeeding moment that he had been deceived, and that his beard was laughed at. There was a certain twitching of his hideous mouth, an occasional uplifting of his scanty eye-brow, and a small vibration of his large ears, which he initiated in his looks well knew portended mischief. Like the first indications of rage in the tiger, when the stiffened bristles of the nose, the stretching of the limbs, and the out-spreading of the claws, put the keeper on his guard, so the Vizir, and his own immediate attendants, instantly armed their minds with ready wit, and their nerves with fresh strength, to counteract whatever of mischief or imprudence might result from the threatening ebullition. After sundry contortions and vain at-

tempts to keep up the dignity of his throne, at length, unable to control himself, he roared out :

“ Take these dogs’ fathers hence ; sweep our courts of them, and their ill-timed presents ; tie them hand and foot, and let them be hostages for the good behaviour of their chief !” Immediate execution was about taking place, and a general excitement against them had made itself manifest, when a stranger, one who had never been seen before at court, a dervish of most imposing manner and appearance, was seen making his way towards the presence. His person was in every way such as to inspire respect. Tall, erect, and broad-shouldered, with an air of mystery and wildness, which men of his profession know so well how to throw around them, awing the ignorant and sometimes astonishing the better informed, he looked towards the throne undaunted and unabashed. Taking full advantage of the privileges allowed his character, he stalked forward without let or hindrance, and taking his stand immediately opposite the King, raising himself up to the full

height of his person, with his right hand extended, he said, in a solemn and audible voice, “ *Hak, Hak !* justice, justice !”

The Shah, who held dervishes and holy men in the highest respect, and who had sufficient worldly wisdom never to wound the popular prejudices on that head, waved his hand to stop the departure of the deputation, and in a softened tone, though still sufficiently excited to make his voice of awful import, said, “ Man, ’tis well thou wearest a dervish’s garb, or else short would be the distance between thy neck and the sabre’s edge. Who art thou, and what wouldst thou with the Shah ?”

The Dervish, stooping down, picked up a few grains of dust from beneath his feet, and holding them up in the air, exclaimed :

“ Then seest thou this ? ’tis what we both shall be.
Equals we’re not, but equals we shall be.
Sacred the dust of him alone shall be
Who justice loves, ’tis *that* I want of thee.”

“ And wherefore sayest thou that the Shah is unjust ?” said the King. “ If fools will venture into the lion’s den, and play with its

teeth, will they not get bitten? If fate hath made us a Shah, respect is as much our due as worship and adoration are due to God, whose decrees we follow. By what rule do you cast up your account? If you have only brought your fine words here to make the capable, you have brought them to a bad market."

"Justice without investigation," said the Dervish, "is worse than hospitality without food. When the passions of a king act without an appeal to his understanding, better for his subjects were it had they been born without heads."

"Man," said the Shah, roused by the severity of these remarks, "are you come to revile the Shah on his throne? If you be a dervish, keep to your fasts and your mortifications; go and sit in a corner, set an example of holiness; count your beads, and say your *namaz*. Leave the affairs of government to those who are appointed by Allah to direct them."

"Allah! the great, the merciful, the all-seeing!" said the Dervish, with great reverence and with every appearance of humility, "speaks

to the hearts of kings in various ways. Sometimes through events of consequence, sometimes through the humblest agents, as in my poor person. The prudence of the pismire is a lesson to Aflatoon. When the poor dervish sounds his horn, let the king think of humility."

"Humility!" said the Shah, "what more humility would you require than we have exercised? Is it nothing to agree to receive rebels on the footing of independent men? Humility may do well for a dervish, but it is a sin in the ruler of kingdoms when it leads to the abasement of his power."

"There is humility proper to kings, as there is humility proper to dervishes," answered the zealot. "The poor man wears a threadbare *caba*, whilst the king clothes his person in shawl and brocade; still both are clothed. Let the king lend his attention to the cases brought before him, let him decide with humility, and exercise his power with discretion."

"Whilst you talk of humility, exercise it yourself, O man," said the Shah. "If you come here to stop the course of justice, take

care lest yourself be carried away in the stream thereof."

"Would that it were so," said the Dervish unmoved; "death is the friend of those who have nothing to live for. Take my leopard skin, and you have nothing else to take from the Dervish Hezzarpicheh, unless it be his own skin, to which you are welcome! But no, death is far from him; though despised he may be, yet still he may foresee events which are closed to the eye of worldly power."

"Ah! a prophet too!" said the Shah, as he thought awhile. "Here, sir prophet!" said he, fumbling in his breast for something which he shortly drew out enclosed tightly in his hand, "advance—if you can foretell events, here, tell me what this hand encloses. Upon this proof of your sanctity depends your footing here."

The Dervish without the smallest hesitation stepped forward, ascended from the court into the dewan khaneh, and approaching the throne, looked at the King's extended hand with fixed attention, and then with a loud and emphatic voice exclaimed:

“ Sons of Isau, rejoice !
A true believer grasps your sacred cross !
Sons of Irân, beware !
The Christian’s triumph is the Moslem’s loss !”

Upon hearing these words, the King’s countenance underwent a visible alteration. It first exhibited unmixed surprise, then doubt, and at length it softened into respect. He kept a profound silence for some minutes, eyeing with intense interest the Dervish, who stood unmoved before him. He seemed irresolute what to do ; he perceived that what had just taken place produced a great sensation among those who had witnessed it. Violence gradually gave way to gentleness, and humility took the place of pride. Slowly replacing in his breast what he had drawn from it, he arose, and in the face of all the court invited the Dervish to be seated, saying, “ O Dervish ! thou art indeed a man of God ; the place where thou standest is honoured. Seat thyself, in the name of the Prophet ! and forgive whatever one so worthless as I have said.”

The Dervish waved his hand and said,

“ Give me a bed of ashes, and invite me there; the Dervish Hezzarpicheh will say *Be cheshm*, upon my eyes be it!—but a throne is only fit for a king; there let him sit, there let the miseries and vanities of life sit with him. Oppress no man—forgive injuries—seek peace, and be just. What else have I to say? Give me a dismissal, and I will go into my corner and say prayers for your soul.”

“ However the Shah,” said the King, “ may turn his countenance away from impostors and those who laugh at other men’s beards, so much the more does he reverence men of undoubted sanctity. Thou hast said well, O man of God! See, this is a Christian’s gift,” at the same time he exhibited to the astonished assembly a small crucifix. “ In truth thou hast dealings with other beings than mortals. Thou must take up thy abode at our court; all things shall be provided thee; forthwith our steps will be fortunate.”

“ A dervish can never be a courtier,” said the wanderer; “ give me a corner to sit in, and I want nothing more.”

“ My city, my palace, my kingdom are the refuge of those who seek protection,—shall they not be open to such men as thou? And the Shah’s orders shall be given that no molestation shall ever be offered thee. Be it as thou desirest. Thou art dismissed.”

The Dervish then withdrew, with the same commanding look with which he came, whilst every one present eyed him with the awe which a supernatural being might inspire. He looked neither on one side nor the other. All the respect which was proffered to him seemed below his attention, and swinging himself in hasty strides from the palace, he was lost in the mazes of the city.

In the mean while the Shah sat for some time in thoughtful mood; and mildness having taken place of anger, he dismissed the Astera-bad deputation with expressions of grace and protection, and ordered that every attention should be paid to them during their stay in Tehran. He gave directions that the Dervish should be sought for, invited to take up his abode at the Shah’s gate, and an honourable

maintenance allotted to him. He then ordered his Prime Vizir to follow him into his *khelwet* or private apartment, and the court broke up.

When they had got there, the King seated on his carpet, the Vizir standing before him, a long pause ensued. Aga Mohammed Shah, like most Persians, was addicted to superstitions of every kind. He had the greatest respect for holy men, observed scrupulously all fasts and mortifications, his arms were burthened with charms and talismans, and he scarcely ever made a step without an astrologer at his elbow. Among his numerous talismans he had recently made the acquisition of a crucifix, which a Roman Catholic priest had presented to him, and which he thought might prove a preservative whenever he risked himself in battle against the Georgian and the Caucasian tribes. He therefore wore it suspended by a string round his neck ; but he had scrupulously kept this fact secret, and when he heard it divulged, in a manner which appeared to him most miraculous, so publicly and so un-

expectedly, the effect produced on his mind was such as might be anticipated.

“We are all astonishment,” said he to Hajji Ibrahim; “did you see the miracles performed by that man of God? This must be the thirteenth Iman. What news have you of him? Did you ever see anything like him before?”

“As I am your sacrifice,” said the Grand Vizir, “this is a thing which passes my comprehension. The days of miracles are gone by; I have heard of one, however, among the *Hezareh*, who feeds multitudes from one cauldron of rice, and who knows? perhaps this may be the man. Your slave will cause enquiries to be made.”

“Go, go,” said the Shah; “in truth my head goes round with surprise. If these dogs of Asterabadis are protected and sit under the shade of a prophet, we must have patience. They said that Zaul Khan is soon to be forthcoming; we will have a few days’ patience. In the mean while let the eye of watchfulness be constantly fixed upon them, and see that

Zohrab the hostage has no communication with them. Upon thy head be it."

The Vizir was then dismissed, and immediately orders were issued that Zohrab's confinement should be stricter than ever, and that so it should remain until the arrival of Zaul Khan.

CHAPTER VI.

When maidens blush and faint withal,
White-head, beware! thy child may fall;
Some Yusuf lurks behind yon wall.

AT this time, three subjects occupied the public mind in Tehran above all others: the Dervish Hezzarpicheh and the Asterabad deputation, Zohrab's marriage with Zulma, and the lady Amima's drooping state of health. In the bazars, at the King's gate, in the baths, along the public maidans, men and women talked of nothing else; but what principally interested them, inasmuch as it in some measure had reference to their own security, was the health of the Princess. The kindness of her disposition, and her readiness to interpose her good offices

with the Shah, whenever some unhappy creature was in disgrace, had so endeared her to the people, that every thing relating to her well-being was sure to meet with the readiest sympathy. It was a current report that she was ill ; that the colour had fled her cheeks, that the brilliancy of her eye was dimmed, and that an universal languor appeared to pervade her person and manner. The Shah himself had caught the alarm ; he had visited her several times, and had tried by every inquiry to ascertain the cause of her disorder. The Hakim Bashi had been frequently consulted, but his skill had been completely baffled. He could not discern to which class of disease to assign her indisposition, for he could neither place it to the hot nor the cold ; at one time, when treating it as a cold disorder, he would order a cooling diet, cucumbers, water-melons, cool sherbets, and ice ; — a coolness would ensue, which made him have recourse to tea, wine, and saffron. As for the affections of the mind, they never came within his consideration ; “ for what affections,” said he, “ could a Persian woman pretend to

have?" Of every thing that the heart of woman could wish, he knew she had more than abundance. No sooner had the thought of a dress or an ornament entered her head, than she was sure to possess it in a few hours after; therefore, he argued, she could not pine for that. If the vision of some dainty dish, some new composition of *halwa*, ever passed through her mind, she was sure to see it realized in a substantial form the next day. Love, he maintained, could not have entered into her breast, for the likeness of man she never saw, excepting, indeed, the ghostlike form of her uncle the Shah, or an indifferent likeness of him in the Khajeh Bashi;—therefore that passion, the doctor concluded, was out of the question. Every one then agreed that in some manner unknown, and by some peculiar obliquity of vision, she must have been struck by the glance of an evil eye. Every old woman about the court, who could by any chance have cast her eye upon the Princess in an unlucky hour, was carefully examined; a register of all squints was made; those who had the reputation of possessing an

ill-boding vision, it was said, the Shah had threatened with extermination : at all events, all such individuals were ordered, on pain of death, to keep out of the Princess's way, and none but pleasing faces to stand before her, none but pleasing speeches and sounds to be made near her. Nightingales were conveyed to her groves, doves cooed about her ; all owls, bats, and ugly reptiles were driven from her, and concerts of sweet voices and musical instruments were ordered to charm her ears. The Shah, by way of engaging her mind in what he too fatally thought must be a cheerful occupation, urged her to superintend the projected marriage ; by this means, the finest stuffs for dresses were constantly brought for her inspection. At one time a costly pair of trowsers, stiffened with brocade, were exhibited ; at another the fascinating *jubbah* of Cashmere shawl, compressing into the smallest compass the waist, that pride and ambition of Persian women, was tried by all around, and she whom it fitted was complimented. Then turquoises, (that stone so esteemed, the emblem of good

fortune,) were showered down before her, whilst diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and sapphires, brought from the royal treasury, were exhibited to her eyes, by way of destroying the evil charm. But these attractions evidently only aggravated the disorder. Recourse was also had to the arts of the Humpback, and he willingly would have cross-examined the Princess upon the state of her mind and health, had she allowed it, but she drove him away with horror. At length it struck the Shah that the Dervish Hezzarpicheh might be of use to her, and he instantly ordered that he should be brought before him.

He was easily found, and when the King's wishes were intimated to him, he followed the messenger who had been sent, without the smallest hesitation.

Upon appearing a second time before the Shah, his Majesty looked at him with new interest, scrutinizing his person in the same manner as one does who thinks he has seen a face before. This scrutiny did not appear to be agreeable to the Dervish, who, although he

kept his former firm and unawed tone, still would have felt happier to have been passed over unobserved.

However, the Shah addressed him in a respectful and confidential manner: he described the various symptoms of his niece's disorder, the apprehensions entertained concerning its result, the conjectures made as to its cause; he complained of the ignorance of his doctors, minutely detailed all that had been done for her, and concluded by making such an eulogium of the Dervish's wisdom and penetration, as to be confident that a visit from him would at once be the means of explaining that which hitherto was unexplained.

The Dervish heard every thing which the King had to say with the profoundest attention, and in answer observed, that until he had conversed with the Princess, and had seen as much of her person as was proper for ascertaining the state of her case, of course he could say nothing. "But, after all," said he in conclusion, "whatever is, is God's; we are God's creatures, and I, who am less than dust, am the least of them."

The Shah then ordered the Khajeh Bashi to request the Princess to be in readiness to receive a visit from the holy man, and having desired the Dervish to attend her summons, he dismissed him.

Amima was seated, as usual, in her own apartment, endeavouring to draw her mind from the unpermitted subject, which was too apt to gain ascendancy over it. When the intended visit of the holy man was announced, although she had heard the whole story of his miraculous penetration, and in some measure partook of the universal respect which he had inspired; yet knowing as she did, how much beyond the reach of medicine or of human art lay the cause of her disorder, she shrank from the scrutiny which this person would probably exercise. However, as she could not, in justice to the interest which her uncle took in her welfare, refuse to receive him, she declared herself ready to accede to the Shah's commands.

The curtain of her own apartment was lowered, and it was so arranged that the Dervish should remain without, and that no part of her person should meet his sight but such as he

positively insisted upon examining. At length it was announced that he was come, and she was invited to approach the curtain. Mariam, her attendant, was the only person in the room with her, whilst the Khajeh Bashi attended the Dervish on the outside. The Princess placed herself near the curtain, and footsteps from without assured her that her examiner was there also. At length a solemn and impressive voice said, "Daughter, we hear bad news of thee; we hear that thy mind and thy affections are diseased, and not thy body: is it so?"

"What can I say?" said Amima, in a subdued voice; "it is even as God pleases."

"That is well," said the voice: "God is our God through life and death; he visits the faithful in various ways, and tries their hearts with a view to their good. Hast thou nothing to reproach thyself with, O daughter of Islam?"

A deep sigh answered that question.

"Thou art a king's child; thou livest with a king; and art indeed a queen. Whatever thou wantest, is thine; thou hast only to wish, and thou art gratified; still thy heart longeth for that which it cannot attain. Is it not so?"

“What can I say?” said Amima in an uncertain tone, happy to have a curtain between her and her visiter, to hide the blush which overspread her cheek at this question.

“Hast thou ever seen the face of unpermitted man?” said the voice in a sterner and severer tone.

“Perhaps, yes,” said Amima with dignity, “’tis difficult to open one’s eyes without seeing God’s creatures.”

“Hath unpermitted man ever seen thy face?” said the voice in a rather severer tone.

Amima’s bosom heaved with agitation upon being called upon to answer; she knew not what to say, but asked for a repetition of the question.

The Dervish then said with a loud voice, “Let all bystanders retreat; this is between me and the Princess.” The Khajeh Bashi and Mariam retreated. He then said, “Daughter, I must feel thy pulse; thy hand.”

When she had placed her arm in his hand, the curtain still intervening, she felt his head advancing towards her, and then in a low and

mysterious whisper he said, "Amima, thou hast seen Zohrab!"

These words produced an immediate effect—she struggled to withdraw her hand; he persisted in keeping hold of it—her heart beat almost audibly—her agitation was intense; but when, next, she heard these words, these unexpected dreaded words, "Amima, thou lovest Zohrab!" the blood rushed back from her heart; it forsook her face; a universal tremor possessed her frame, and only supported by the Dervish who held her hand, she would have fallen prone into a swoon, had she not been upheld by Mariam, who seeing her state, rushed to her assistance.

This brought forward the Khajeh Bashi; but in the struggle the curtain was drawn back, and the Dervish caught a sight of the face of the Princess. The guardian of the women, alarmed at what had happened, cried out for help, and women and eunuchs came running from all parts, whilst the Dervish, cool and unmoved, turned his steps whence he came, and left the walls of the harem.

In the mean while, report spread abroad that

the Princess Amima, having been visited by the new Dervish, had suddenly been struck to the ground by the mere power of his touch, so powerful and terrific a charm did he wield; and that scarcely had he done so, when he disappeared in a miraculous manner, nobody knew how.

The whole of the royal anderoon was thrown into confusion; the doctor-in-chief was sent for, all the old women were consulted, and ere a quarter of an hour had elapsed, such was the consternation within and without the palace, that it might have been supposed the greatest misfortune had overtaken the community. A report of what had befallen the Princess was immediately forwarded to the Shah, and he lost no time in ordering the Dervish to appear before him.

In the mean while, Amima, having recovered from her swoon, requested that she might be left alone; and when everybody was gone from before her, leaving only Mariam in attendance, she then endeavoured to gather her wandering senses, and to recollect what really had taken place. The words of the Dervish still rang in her ears. In vain she inquired who and what

this man might be ; she could gain no intelligence farther than that he had arrived with the deputation from Asterabad. She carefully kept, even from her confidant, what had been the cause of her sudden seizure, laying it principally to the weakness of her state, and to the necessity of communicating with a strange man, when she was more fit for her bed. Mariam was, however, too penetrating to allow such an excuse to have any weight in her mind, and in the deepest consternation she daily saw her mistress pine and waste away, without any means in her power to redeem her from so wretched a state. Well she knew what was the real cause of her suffering, and, after having exhausted every thought in endeavouring to relieve her, she usually remained as much perplexed as at first. There was one expedient to which she sometimes thought of having recourse, but she never could gain sufficient courage to put it into practice.

The Dervish having been sought and found, was again conducted before the King.

“ We hear strange things of thee,” said the

Shah. "Thou findest all quiet, and thou leavest all in commotion. What hast thou done?"

"What cure was ever performed," said the Dervish, "without some previous pain?"

"But we hear of spells and incantations? Open your eyes," said the King, with great animation; "we are not to be played with. We reward merit, but woe be to deceit. If aught happens to our house, and good fortune turn its back upon us, by the head of the King! by the head of the King, I swear! that thy ears would not be worth two copper coins, nor thy head the rind of a water melon. Again, I say, Dervish, open thy eyes!"

"Would to heaven that patience were to be found in the apothecary's shop!" exclaimed the Dervish, "then might it be taken by the cupfull, and wisdom might have fair play. What more can the poor Dervish say? but here is his head; to take it from him were a benefit."

"What signifies those lumps of bone and flesh and hair called thy head, to the state of Persia, when through thee perhaps we lose one of the brightest jewels of our crown? Many

such as thou exist, but where shall the Shah find another Amima? Say, man, what hast thou done?"

"Send to thy house and there inquire. If I have done aught but what is justified by truth, here stands the Dervish Hezzarpicheh, and thou art an absolute King;—but take this with thee. If before twice seven days be expired, he does not remove the cause of the Princess's complaint, he will himself come with this cord about his neck instead of round his waist, and say Bismillah!"

"Did you hear that?" said the King to Sadek, who stood at hand (for this scene took place in the private apartment). "We take thee at that thy word," said the Shah to the Dervish; "thou hast worked one miracle, worthy of the blessed Imans, therefore justice is thy due, and the reverence of the Shah thou shalt not want. Be at hand, and when we want thee, we will send for thee."

The Dervish upon this took his leave, and quitting the palace, retreated with his usual gait to his cell, a small dark room, situated

near the residence of the Asterabad and Turcoman deputies, which was not far distant from the royal mosque. Here he remained in apparently religious concealment; his only furniture a coarse mat, upon which he placed his leopard skin; his only luxury a pitcher full of water, which he drew himself from an adjoining reservoir.

The reputation of the feat which he had performed before the Shah, had made him an object of attention throughout the city; the door of his cell was thronged from morning to night by high and low, rich and poor, all anxious either to receive his advice, to endeavour through his means to gain a glimpse into futurity, or to obtain some preservative against sickness or misfortune. Talismans or charms prescribed by him, or written with his own hand, were in the greatest request. The lover, the avaricious man, the ambitious, the coward, the gambler, all and every profession and station in life, wanted to know something more of their fate or actual being, than was vouchsafed to them from heaven, and to our Dervish they came, overflow-

ing with credulity, and ready to acknowledge the power of any miracle, even if worked upon their own persons. It was towards the close of the day upon which he had visited the Princess, when he thought that he should no more be disturbed, that he heard footsteps approaching his door, and looking out, he perceived a well-veiled and richly-dressed woman alighting from a finely-caparisoned mule, held by a young black eunuch. She left her equipage a few paces off, and stepped into his dark chamber in a rather mysterious manner, although without any apparent shyness. After having properly saluted the holy man, she said, "I am come upon a business of consequence, O Dervish ! it is one of life or death. The renown of your wisdom has spread far and wide throughout the city, and it is to consult you that I am come."

"Life and death are in the hands of God," said the Dervish. "Who am I that am to be consulted upon things of such import? But though mean I am, still, whatever is in my power, that command. Speak, my ears are yours."

"You must understand almost ere I open

my lips," said the lady, "for my words are numbered. I cannot speak plainly all I would say, for I scarcely dare trust even the recesses of my own understanding with the knowledge which is there concealed."

"Speak," said the Dervish; "already we know your wishes. You must answer some questions?" And then putting himself into an inquisitorial attitude, he said, "You come not for yourself, but for one dearer to you than yourself? Is it so?"

"Allah!" cried the lady: "even so."

"Still all your own well-being depends upon that of your other self?"

"Yes," said the astonished lady.

"You have acquired a secret known to none but yourself."

"Yes."

"And that secret is, that your friend loves. You know 'tis a dangerous love; that it involves danger if it be indulged; and if it be not indulged, it wastes away the issues of life."

"Oh yes, true, true," said the unknown visiter; "O tell me, as you are a true believer!

as you revere our holy Prophet and love Allah ! tell me what is to be done ?”

“ Now open your eyes ; and as you love your soul,” said the Dervish, “ answer me in truth— Does your friend hold any communication with the man she loves ?”

“ Allah, Allah !” cried the lady ; “ as I believe in the Prophet, no, no !”

“ Does he know that she loves him ?” said he.

“ Perhaps yes ; perhaps no ;” said the maiden after some thought ; “ rather yes than no.”

“ So—is it ?” said the Dervish apparently in deep thought. “ Could they meet if they were to try ?”

“ *Astafferallah* — Heaven forbid !” said she, “ where ? how ? when ? Are there not more guards round the harem than stars in the firmament ? Have the lynxes sharper eyes than they ? Besides, is he not guarded too ?”

“ I now understand,” said he. “ Oh ! he is guarded too !”

“ Ah ! what have I said ?” exclaimed she.

“ Suppress your fear,” said he, “ for all is known to me.”

“ But what I principally desire of you,” said the lady, “ is to counteract the evil machinations of two living demons in the form of a man and a woman, whose arts are daily undermining the peace of her, for the well-being of whom I have sought your advice.”

“ They shall be counteracted,” said the Dervish. “ I will cause their livers to drop, their wit shall shrivel up, and they shall remain less than dogs’ sons.”

“ And when will this be ?” said she rather incredulously.

“ When !” said the Dervish, with an emphatic pause ; then in a slow cadence he continued thus :—

“ When the tyrant’s wrath is raging ;
When blood ’gainst blood fierce war is waging ;
When innocence for safety flies,
And houseless, friendless, cheerless dies ;
When pity from the heart is driven ;
Then think of me, and trust in Heaven.”

Mariam, (for the reader need not be told it was she,) upon hearing these prophetic words, and having been struck by the wild and awful manner in which they had been delivered, felt

alarmed to find herself alone with the Dervish, and would have made an abrupt departure; but recollecting herself she said, "But ere I am dismissed, you must give me some immediate remedy. We have every faith in your handwriting. We must be protected by some talisman emanating from your person. And here," said she, holding out a bag of gold, "this will show you we are not unmindful of justice."

"Gold to him who wants but bread and water, is like sowing the earth with diamonds; they may enrich it, but it will bring forth no fruit. Take back your pelf; but bear this along with you."

He then took a piece of paper, and writing some few words upon it, he rolled it up, sealed it, and delivering it to Mariam said, "As you value your own life and that of your friend, give this paper to her unopened. She alone is to read it; and that the words it contains may effectually enter her soul, let them be washed off, made into a potion, and drunk off. See you to it, but read not the writing."

Having delivered this to her, she took her

leave, and forthwith returned to her mistress, for whose preservation, although unknown to her, she had paid this visit. She had long been convinced that her mistress was under the influence of some irresistible agency, exercised over her by the combined arts and intrigues of the Humpback and Zulma, and with the greatest faith in the powers of the Dervish she determined to try to what extent he might be induced to exert them in her favour.

She found Amima in a calm and resigned frame of mind, for she had just refreshed herself by prayer. With her face resting on her hand, she leant upon the open window-frame, and was contemplating the beautiful and tranquil scenery of her ever-verdant and flower-embellished grove, and lending her ear to the many soft notes of the various birds which lived in a happy security among her cypress and chenar trees. Mariam, on the contrary, approached her with a face full of excitement, and would at once have proceeded to put her scheme into full force, had not her zeal been broken by the voice of her mistress, who, when she saw her enter,

turned her head towards her, and said, "Mariam, my soul, where have you been thus long? your place has been empty. I wanted to tell you how much better I feel, and how much happier I am now than I have been for some time past."

"*Al ham duliha!* praise be to God;" said her attendant, "this is a piece of good news; but *Mashallah!* please Heaven, I have brought you something which I trust will ensure the continuance of such a blessing." She then informed her mistress of the step which she had taken; related with all the particularity of woman's narration, the history of her visit to the Dervish; endeavoured to give a faithful version of the words of his awful prophecy; and finished by exhibiting with great triumph the precious talisman which she had acquired.

Amima, who shared the common faith of her countrywomen in talismans and supernatural agencies, received the paper with great appearance of interest, looked at it, inspected the seal, and having expressed her gratitude to Mariam for all the trouble and interest she had taken in her behalf, said, "Ah, Mariam! if it will but secure me a continuance of the peace which I

now enjoy, you will, indeed, have conferred a benefit upon me, which I shall never have it in my power to repay. Now tell me what is to be done?"

"As I am your sacrifice!" said her attendant, "you and you only are to break open the seal; you and you only are to read the words written within; and you then are to take them inwardly, in order that they may remain fixed for ever on your heart."

"Let me see them," said Amima, with a flush on her cheek and a beating heart; whilst she repeated to herself in smothered accents, her "*Bismillah il rakhman il rakheem!* in the name of God be merciful," &c.; and then with a slow and cautious hand broke open the seal, and unrolled the paper. She had scarcely half opened it, when, in the middle, these words in large characters met her eyes—"As you would live, forget Zohrab; forget! forget! forget!" The paper fell from her hands; the colour forsook her cheeks; a quick heaving of her breast seemed to convulse her throat; and covering her face with both her hands, she imposed deep silence upon herself. Mariam stood

for some time like one petrified ; her faith in the charm, and in the author of it, increased an hundredfold when she witnessed the power and suddenness of its effect. She was fearful by any act of hers to disturb the state into which it had thrown her mistress, conceiving that she might by her officiousness destroy the intended effects ; but when she saw how unmoved she remained, and knowing that something was still to be done, quickly she stooped down, and without looking at the contents of the paper, immersed it into a basin of water, until the writing was completely washed out of it, and then, in the gentlest manner, and with the softest accents, approached her mistress, entreating her to drink the prescribed draught. She was surprised and alarmed, instead of being answered in her usual quiet manner, to see the suddenness and abruptness of her action. Roused from her apparent lethargy, and seizing the cup, she forthwith threw the contents on the ground, exclaiming with a face beaming with violent passion, “ Never ! never ! never ! O Allah, O holy Prophet ! let me die. But never ! never ! never ! ”

Mariam would have sought an explanation, and was about addressing her mistress; but finding that Amima wished to be left alone, without further intrusion she took her leave. Amima remained absorbed in thought for some time. In vain she turned over in her mind who this person could be, who appeared so averse to her entertaining any thoughts of Zohrab, and how he had penetrated a sentiment which, she flattered herself, was confined to her own breast. She began to fear that she was under the influence of some agency more than human, and willingly would have consulted Mariam, had she not feared that some fatal consequence might occur to Zohrab. She determined, however, in conformity to her own sense of what was right, as well as to the admonition of her mysterious monitor, to endeavour to steel her heart against him; and in this temper we shall for the present leave her.

CHAPTER VII.

The elephant caught in the pit, said to itself, " Let me but once get out, and I will never be here again."

LOCMAN.

ZOHRAB'S confinement, since the arrival of the deputation from Asterabad, had been so strictly enforced, that, excepting his own attendant, he had scarcely seen a living soul. He had endeavoured by every means in his power to gain permission to communicate with his father, whom he and everybody else expected to see as its chief; but what was his dismay when he heard that he was not there ! Vainly had he set every engine to work, in order to be allowed an interview with his uncle, and his old friends the Turcoman chiefs ; but the Shah was inexorable, and the Vizir himself, who suspected that there might be some hidden scheme at work, was as strict in his prohibition as his royal master.

He was, however, assured that this severity would be but of short duration, since, if there was any truth in the words of the deputies, Zaul Khan would soon appear. He endeavoured therefore to arm himself with patience, and in the mean while, through the means of his intelligent servant, the youthful Ali, to acquire as much information as possible upon what was going on.

Since this redoubled strictness, the preparations for his marriage had been suspended, and he had been saved the disagreeable necessity of hearing any more upon that subject. The long and weary days which he passed thus secluded, were cheered by no other recreation than an excursion to the terrace of his apartment, where, although the now closed and cheerless turret offered no immediate object for his contemplation, it still afforded him a never-failing subject for rekindling recollections and warming his imagination.

It was on the evening of the second day after Mariam's visit to the Dervish, just as the day was drawing to a close, when, as usual, Zohrab

was seated in solitary and melancholy mood upon his terrace, that he heard a noise at the window of the turret. On a sudden the lattice opened, and he saw a hand and arm thrust forth, which instantly threw something towards him, and then disappeared. It fell almost at his feet. In the greatest anxiety he picked it up, and found that it consisted of a bunch of violets. He turned them over and over, not knowing exactly what to make of so strange a present, when, to his surprise, he discovered within the heap a small note, neatly rolled up and directed to himself. He opened it and found these words :—

“ Life depends upon your acquiescence. Be prepared, stout in heart and firm of purpose, to follow whithersoever you shall be led to-morrow ere the first call of evening prayer, and do whatever your guide shall ordain.”

We leave the reader to imagine his surprise. He had too exalted an idea of the excellence and sense of propriety of the object of his love, to think that she could have made these advances : it was impossible that the hand and arm which

he had seen could be hers ; yet, who amongst the females of the harem but herself had access to the turret ? Her attendant Mariam, indeed, he thought, might not be that model of perfection which her mistress was ; but still, could she have ventured upon such an invitation to him, and not have dreaded the horrid results which must await her in case of discovery ? However perplexed he might be in his endeavours to discover who his friend could be, and however aware he was of the danger of the enterprise to which he was invited, still he determined, happen what might, not to shrink from it. The first words of the note were quite a sufficient incentive, and made him conceive that the welfare of Amima might in some manner be implicated, for he was aware of her wretched state both of mind and body.

The time that was to elapse before the beginning of his adventure, was taken up in conjecture. He felt that his affairs were now drawing to a crisis ; and indeed so weary was he of confinement and of the miseries of inactivity, that he rejoiced at any occurrence, whatever might

be its result, which would emancipate him from his prison. The night passed away—the morning came—noon-day prayer was announced—and the day began to draw to a close, when the door of his court-yard was opened by his servant Ali, who handed in a tall woman, closely veiled. There was much precaution in her manner, and it immediately struck him that she was in fact his promised guide. Ali preceded her by a few steps, and having in a hurried manner informed his master that his mother was come to speak a few words to him, he withdrew. She immediately followed, and after having looked well about the apartment, in order to ascertain that she was alone with Zohrab, she straight held out a violet to him, and said, “Bismillah ! let there not be a moment’s delay.”

“ In the name of Allah, what am I to do ? ” said the anxious youth.

“ Put on this veil, these *chakchurs*,* these slippers, immediately,” said she ; “ keep a

* *Chakchur*, a sort of linen stocking, which encloses the foot and fastens on the knee, and worn by the Persian women when they issue from their houses completely veiled.

steady silence, and allow Ali to conduct you thus to the gate of the harem ; there you will be met and conducted by another guide, and then God protect your ways ! May the blessed Hussein be your protector !”

“ But explain,” said Zohrab, “ who sends you ? whom am I to see ?”

“ You will know all in good time. O my good Aga ! I am the mother of that child whom you love, and will not willingly bring ashes on your head. Go, in the name of the Prophet !”

She then unfolded an ample veil, which was concealed under her own, and helped Zohrab to disguise himself. Having increased the circumference of his head by a shawl, clothed his feet and legs with the ample *chakchurs*, and then covered him completely over with the veil, she consigned him to the care of Ali. She had been permitted by the guard at the gate of the chief executioner’s house to pass, upon a pretext that she was carrying medicine to the hostage ; and as Zohrab was about her own height, she was so well personified by him upon his exit, that there was no chance of detection. She

remained in his apartment during his absence, in order to keep the door locked against any occasional intruder.

Having passed the guard without detection, Zohrab followed Ali, to whom every sort of privilege was granted, owing to his popularity with the guards and men in office, and then crossed the great maidan, and passed through the palace gate. They hastened through the long passages of the Ark, and at length reached the principal entrance of the women's apartments. There he took hold of Ali's hand, and as both the boy and his mother were well known to every one, they passed on unnoticed till they came to the wicket, where a guard of eunuchs was stationed. Here Zohrab was obliged to leave Ali; and, with an involuntary tremor, found himself making his way through unknown courts, where, should he be discovered, instant death would not fail to await him. He had passed the first eunuch unnoticed; but, whether his gait caught the observation of a group of others who were seated farther on, or whether, not seeing him in company with Ali,

they did not recognize him for the late chief huntsman's widow, one of them cried, " Whom is that ' weak one ' in search of ? Give ear ; who are you ? "

Zohrab walked on heedless of these words ; two of the eunuchs arose, and were going to lay violent hands upon him, when an unveiled woman, whom Zohrab immediately recognized to be Mariam, stepped from a doorway, and exclaimed with great asperity of accent, " How is this ? O you unfortunate ! May not the servants of the Banou pass unnoticed ? Shall it be said that the widow of one of the Shah's best servants, favoured by the Princess, is stopped in her way to the threshold of royalty ? Are ye not ashamed ? "

Upon this the eunuchs retired, not a little abashed at the rebuff, and bowed their heads before her who was almost as powerful as her mistress within the walls in which they stood.

Mariam, making a sign to Zohrab enjoining silence, proceeded with him through several courts, and at length stopped where an extend-

ed curtain before a large open window denoted the habitation of an exalted personage. She then made him go through a small door into a narrow court, which led them into a *cufsh khoneh*, where she made him take off his veil and *chukchurs*, and desired him to wait patiently without stirring hand or foot until she came for him. In vain he requested to know what could be the object of this mystery, and why and wherefore he had been conducted hither; he could get no other answer from his conductress, than the words "silence and patience."

It is necessary to explain that Mariam, urged on by her sincere devotion to her mistress, having in vain tried every scheme to restore her to health, and knowing full well what was the true cause of her misery, at length had determined, as a last resource, to bring on an interview between her and Zohrab. Had she given a hint of her intention to her mistress, she well knew that it might have been the means of driving her from her presence for ever; she therefore had determined to take all the consequence of such a step upon herself, and to

depend upon the all-powerful effects of Zohrab's appearance, which she was certain would end in softening her heart to tenderness, and thus at once secure her own pardon, and that most soothing of all assurances to one in love, that her passion was returned in all its ardour.

As soon as she had deposited Zohrab in a place of safety secure from observation, she went in to her mistress, who was seated quietly in her room engaged in her usual occupations. Mariam's object was to induce her to go into the *khelwet*, or secret apartment, common to Persian houses, where the interview might take place without the possibility of interruption ; and she succeeded, having persuaded her mistress that she had something of importance to communicate, which she could not do in the open room in which they were.

"And why not here, Mariam?" said Amima smiling. "We are not vizirs, or mastofis, that have secrets of sufficient importance to require a *khelwet*."

"Heaven preserve my Princess, from all harm!" said Mariam, "but your slave has a

secret, though she be a slave ; and she supplicates her to cede to her wishes."

" So be it," said Amima, " since you desire it ; let us go, in the name of Allah."

They then proceeded into the private room. Mariam carefully closed and barred the outer door ; the Princess seated herself, her mind tossed between curiosity and surprise at what was about to happen. Mariam smiling, in the act of leaving the room to return to Zohrab, said, " God grant that the happiness of my Banou may be secured ! Let her prepare herself for strange things." She then went in to Zohrab, took him by the arm, made him follow her, and, without thinking of the consequences, at once placed him before her mistress.

Amima's sensations upon seeing this apparition were too overpowering to be repressed. Indignation first roused her upon seeing a man in her own sanctuary, herself unveiled, and unprotected. She would have fled and called for assistance ; but the instant she recognised that man to be Zohrab, the idol of her thoughts, the beloved of her heart, the revulsion which took

place in her breast was so great and sudden, that the blood forsook her cheeks, a deadly mist came over her eyes, her limbs refused to do their office, and she fainted hopelessly away.

The extent of her indiscretion at once forcibly struck the imprudent and perplexed Mariam. “*Ahi!* what have I done?” she exclaimed in piteous accents. “She dies, she dies! Where shall I go? what ashes have fallen upon my head!” She seemed entirely to have lost her reason; and her mistress would probably have received no assistance, had not Zohrab, who now at once had his eyes opened upon his position, immediately rushed to the help of Amima. He sprang to the fountain in the court for water; he chafed her temples, restored circulation to her hands; and so bestirred himself, that little by little his raptures were roused to the utmost pitch by seeing animation gradually return to her beautiful countenance. But when she found herself thus situated, she (the Musulman maid, who looked upon her virgin character as blasted by the sight of a man even at a distance) could only see in the beloved Zoh-

rab of her imagination, the outlaw of a harem, a man ; and therefore the first accents which she uttered were those of horror and indignation at his presence, and at the insult which he had put upon her. “ Go, go !—in the name of Allah, go !—why do you stay ?—why came you ? who are you ? You are neither my brother nor my father—go, go !” She then entreated and ordered Mariam, whose wits seemed to have utterly forsaken her, to send him away. She herself rose to go, when Zohrab, overpowered by his contending feelings, innocent of any evil intention, threw himself on his knees before her, and, in the humblest and most imploring accents, entreated her forgiveness, disavowed any wish of insulting her, and loudly asserted his ignorance of what was about to await him, when he was called upon to assist, as he said, upon a matter of life and death.

This scene had scarcely commenced, ere an endeavour to enter the outer door of the khelwet was perceived, and was followed by a knocking. The words, “ Open, the Shah is coming,” were then distinctly heard. Then,

indeed, sense was restored to the whole three ; the danger of their position immediately spoke for itself, and self-preservation took the place of every other feeling. Zohrab's countenance immediately assumed a settled and determined appearance, as if he would say, " I am prepared for every thing."

Amima at once changed from indignation to tenderness. The danger in which her lover stood rushed at once upon her mind ; and heedless of every thing excepting his safety, she said to him in a calm, determined tone—" Here is my hand, Zohrab ! If death is to be our lot, let it be thus—better to die thus, than to live separated !"

These words overwhelmed the devoted lover with rapturous joy ; and no martyr at the stake ever rejoiced so much at laying down his life for his faith, as Zohrab did in the prospect of so dying for his love. But the fear of death had an immediate and different effect upon Mariam ; it instantly brought back all her scattered wits, and roused her to action. She flew to the assailed door, and expostulated with the

eunuch who wanted to gain admission ; asserted that her mistress was unwell, and made as much pretext for delay as she could devise. She then returned to Zohrab in the greatest trepidation. Surrounded as the apartment then was by the royal attendants — certain as he would be of meeting the King and his suite, if he wished to make his escape — there seemed no hope of safety. In this dilemma, the knocking at the door was renewed with double violence, and a voice announced that the Shah intended to take the air in the turret. There was no other way to the turret than through this very private room ; — dismay and despair overcame them all ; — what was to be done ? “ Hide him here ! ” said Amima. “ Go there ! ” cried Mariam. Every thing was odiously exposed ; and as there are no hiding-places in Persian rooms, it was impossible to secrete him anywhere. He could not resume the veil without the certainty of its being torn from him ; for no woman in the harem is allowed to appear before the Shah so covered. Thus, in absolute despair, they all three rushed to the turret top. When they got

there, and looked at the hopeless height of the building, their courage forsook them, and nothing less than death seemed to be in store. Zohrab, however, taking a calm survey of the surrounding buildings, saw one higher than the rest, to which, had he some rope, or help to rest his hand upon, he thought he might swing himself forward. It struck him that his ample veil might, if properly fixed and suspended, lower him down to a considerable distance. Upon this suggestion, Amima immediately offered a Cashmerian shawl, and every handkerchief which she possessed; Mariam did the same; and without the smallest loss of time they managed to tie them together in such a manner that, when lowered, Zohrab would have apparently but little difficulty in setting foot upon the spot which he had pointed out. His resolution was soon made; one end of the veil was fastened to the middle prop of the casement. The evening's shades, which had now come on, were favourable: he was about taking his departure, when, kneeling before his mistress, he took her hand to entreat her forgiveness. Ma-

riam upon this fled down the stairs, in order to make proper explanations to the impatient eunuchs; and during this absence of all witnesses, the lovers gave themselves up to the rapturous effusions of their long-smothered passion, and in one short minute made more vows of eternal constancy and love than it is supposed lips, eyes, and tongue, could make in so short a time. Just as Zohrab was about taking his last farewell, Amima drew from her arm an armlet, composed of costly and magnificent emeralds, inscribed with sacred invocations, a favourite talisman long worn by her father, and given to her by her uncle. "Here," said she, "let this preserve my Zohrab: wear it for Amima's sake; it is the only remembrance she can give him." Zohrab received it with rapture; threw it with ecstasy into his bosom, and bidding a long lingering adieu, stepped lightly from the window; and as his person gradually disappeared, he did not cease looking up with the most ardent expressions of endearment to his anxious love, who with looks of feverish and convulsive interest as she bent over the

window, marked his dangerous descent. He had reached the very extremity of the suspended veil and shawls, but it was evident that their length fell short of the expected mark. He swung in suspense in the air, his feet occasionally resting against the turret side. Amima's fears were so roused for his safety, that she would have screamed out for assistance, when on a sudden she saw him impel himself forward, and making a fearful and almost incredible bound, perceived that he had alighted in safety on the intended spot. She would have thrown herself upon her knees to return thanks to Heaven for this mercy, but she had only time to draw up the pendant veil and shawls before Mariam appeared, followed by the Khajeh Bashi foaming with rage at the impediments placed in the way of the performance of the Shah's commands. "What news is this?" he roared out at the top of his cracked and croaking voice. "What has happened? The asylum of the universe is coming, and every thing is barred and bolted. Is this a harem? or is it a den of rebels?" Mariam, who had

perceived that all was well, and had from the turret seen Zohrab landed in safety upon his own terrace, immediately adopted a new tone with the comptroller of the women.

“ And who are you, you old carcase without a soul ! you old scabbard without a sword ! ” said she, “ that dare use your vile lungs in this fashion in the presence of our noble Lady Banou ? Are these her apartments, or are they not ? Is she to render an account to such a slip of parchment as you, when or where she chooses to take her rest, and to be free from intrusion ? Go, cur ! and use your yelping throat elsewhere.”

“ Then the Shah, I suppose, is nothing in your eyes,” said he ; “ but, although he may be nothing in yours, he is something in mine, for by a nod of his head he may take off mine, and then what good will my lady’s rest do to me ? ”

“ And please Allah he may ! ” said Mariam. “ We’ll all teach the Shah to nod ; ” and taking him to the side of the turret, she showed him a vacant spot, and said, “ and

there let us trust that your hated noddle may be nodded off."

"And what may this be?" said the old guardian, seizing the collected veil and shawls which they had not had time to untie. "By Allah! if our loved Princess was not the princess she is, there would be treason here. In any other harem, a *katl-i-àm*, a universal massacre, would ensue."

"And what is it," said Mariam, "but something by which to hang an old whipt cur like yourself? Say but two more words, and all the women in the anderoon shall come at my command, and you shall swing high in air, as a scarecrow, to warn such hideous birds of prey as you from off our premises. Surely our lady and her attendants may invent new veils if they choose!" Upon which she deliberately untied the different knots, and restored the shawls and veil to their original shape, whilst the Khajeh set his officers to prepare the royal seat for the Shah.

During the course of this conversation, Amima, having left the turret, had descended

to receive the Shah. On this occasion, the results of Mariam's operations in favour of her mistress, however fatal at first they promised to be, had in fact proved such as she expected to produce. The short interview which our heroine had had with her lover—that all absorbing and cheering sentiment, the certainty of being loved by the person of one's choice, so soothing to our nature, had infused new life and a brilliant cheerfulness into her whole being. All her miseries appeared at once expelled, and she stood before her uncle a totally different person, both in health and spirits.

This manifested itself so strongly, when she received him, that he was immediately struck with it, and involuntarily exclaimed, “*Mashallah ! mashallah !* Wonderful man is the Dervish Hezzarpicheh. He promised that ere long our Banou should be restored to health ; see what a change has been effected !”

“*Alham du lillah !*” exclaimed all the women present.

“ Say,” said the King to his niece, “ what

did the Dervish prescribe? Was it performed by talisman or medicine?"

"What can I say?" said Amima, blushing deeply; "whatever has happened, I am grateful that we can receive the King of kings with a white face, and with looks with which he is pleased."

"May I be your sacrifice!" said the chief guardian of the women, "our lady is not only merry in looks, but she is full of pranks and games. She and her vizir, the slave Mariam, would have hanged your Majesty's less than the least, your humble slave."

"You would then have been the highest of the most exalted," answered the Shah, grinning a smile: "Much good may it do you!"

At this sally everybody present laughed, and in their hearts the women longed that their mistress had put her prank into execution, so truly did they hate their appointed protector.

The Shah had in truth been made supremely happy by the improvement which he had remarked in the health and spirits of his niece.

His visit to her had been intentionally sudden, for he had harboured a suspicion in his mind that the Dervish Hezzarpicheh was not the person whom he represented himself to be, and he was therefore anxious to judge with his own eyes, before any scheme of deceit could be arranged, how far the promises which he had made as to her recovery were likely to be valid. Instead, then, of wreaking his vengeance upon him, which he was prepared to do, for being an impostor, his faith in his power was increased, and his natural impatience and irritability were soothed by the confidence which he had inspired. He allowed the Asterabadian and Turcoman deputies to enjoy every liberty in the city, scarcely required any superintendence of their proceedings, and waited for the arrival of Zaul Khan as an undoubted event.

CHAPTER VIII.

Love lost is like the mare's milk which the Arab maiden spilt in the sand; she may cry over it, but she will never get it into the skin again.

LOVES IN THE DESERT.

THE surprise of the chief huntsman's widow upon seeing Zohrab return by the terrace instead of the door of his dwelling, almost made her look upon him as a supernatural being; and without asking him a single question, she took her departure with true discretion and without delay, determining to seek her son, who was waiting at the gate of the harem to reconduct his master home.

In the enchantment of possessing the love of Amima, Zohrab had entirely forgotten the danger to which he had been exposed. He dwelt upon every circumstance of his interview with

the solicitude of an enraptured lover. He was as avaricious of every word which she had addressed to him, as a miser who can never sufficiently count over and feast upon the gold which he has unexpectedly found. What visions of future bliss, what raptures of enjoyment did he not promise to himself, as he allowed his imagination a free range over the bewitching pictures presented to him by hope ! His youthful mind, too little practised in the ways of life, and particularly in the schemes of Persian intrigue, could look upon the future friendship of his father and the Shah as certain, and could almost point out the very moment when, as a necessary link to the union of the two states, the niece of the Shah would be united to the son of the powerful chief of Asterabad.

He was in the midst of these visions, when he heard the door of his apartment opened, and to his dismay perceived the well-remembered figure of his mysterious female visiter approach him. This time she did not long preserve her incognito, but at once taking off her veil, dis-

closed to the eyes of Zohrab the animated and impassioned countenance, the beautiful and seductive form of the ardent Zulma. To retreat was impossible, to turn her away with violence was contrary to the manliness of his nature; but to conceal his disgust, particularly immediately after the rapturous moments of a true passion which he had enjoyed, was impossible. He received her in the coldest manner, and although she seated herself without hesitation, he insisted upon standing before her; thereby intimating his determination to keep himself upon no terms of equality, giving to her the precedence and authority due to his jailer.

“ Whence come ye ?” said she, with great agitation. “ As ye would not die, tell me, have you not been absent ?”

“ Am I to render an account of myself to any one who chooses to question me ?” said Zohrab. “ If you are my jailer, it is enough that you find me true to my prison.”

“ What was floating in the air, not a few minutes since,” said Zulma, “ between you

turret and your terrace? Have you not been visited by some one? My eyes cannot have deceived me."

"There may or there may not be visions floating in the air," said the cautious lover; "it is not for me to affirm or deny the fact; but all that you can wish to ascertain is, that I am your prisoner, and here I am. What more can you desire?"

"My prisoner, Zohrab!" said she, with a softened tone; "how can you be my prisoner? Am I not thine? Are we not affianced man and wife? Am I not thy humblest slave?"

"The Shah has shown a great deal of condescension towards me," said Zohrab, in an embarrassed manner, "and has wished to bestow upon me the hand of the most celebrated woman in his court; but such a reward is totally unmerited by me, and I am altogether unworthy of such a benefit."

"What words are these?" said Zulma; "there is no turning back from what has been decreed. A man like Zohrab Khan is not to retreat from his word."

“What word!” said our hero, with scorn on his lip. “What word have I ever given that I have not kept?”

“You are my affianced husband,” said Zulma, the colour rising quickly into her face. “You have therefore given me your word; and can you retract it?”

“Hear me, lady,” said Zohrab, with great composure, at the same time with distance of manner; “I never gave my word that I would be your husband. It has been the business of those whose interest it was that it should be so, to spread such a report, but I have never been a party concerned, and let me now no longer allow you to be deceived. I never can be your husband—and more—I never will be your husband.”

The sudden appearance of brilliant flame in a dark night on the summit of a volcano—the angry foam boiling on the surface of the sea in a squall, would but ill convey an idea of the wrath which at once mantled in the countenance of Zulma, when she heard these words. Love kept her violence in check,

but suspicious jealousy impelled it on — she would have stabbed at the same time that she would have pressed him to her heart. Words could scarcely find utterance through her choaking throat, but when they did, they came forth with the rapidity of a torrent.

“ And is it thus ! And have I fallen so low ? Am I to be rejected, to be spurned at, by one whose life I have saved at the expense of my own honour ? Where am I ?—do I dream ?—Is it not said or sung in every corner of the street, that Zulma and Zohrab are man and wife ? and am I now to be told that I am a liar ? that it is not so ? What words are these ? What fire is in my brain ? What ashes have fallen on my head ? I ! I, who am that Zulma who make the men of Tehran kiss the dust of my slippers, whose very name causes the heart to quake, and whose eye inflames hearts—am I to be rejected ? Heaven forbid ! Be Allah my witness ! this grief I will not devour alone—shame shall not fall upon me alone ! Zohrab, thou who callest thyself a man, canst thou see this, and not repine at thy hated words ? Not my husband ? In the name of Allah, and why not ?

What have I done? Have I not loved thee as woman never loved?—have I not called upon thee night and morning?—have I not sat on yonder terrace to catch a glimpse of thee, until the sun scorched my temples, and until the dews of the night ate into the marrow of my bones? And am I to be told that I am nothing to thee? O Allah, great and good! O holy Prophet! help to thy poor slave! What have I done that this heavy misery should await me! I rejected! I!—am I Zulma, or am I some wretch worthy of hate? Wherefore behave thus to me?—let me entreat thee.”—Here the impassioned maiden raised her eyes and her hands towards the embarrassed youth, and would have clasped his knees; but he stepped forward to prevent her; and, affected by this act of humility, he said as many soothing and consolatory things as the exigency of the moment required, but still kept himself from uttering one word which might give a hope of relenting.

During the whole of this scene, Zohrab's patience and good-nature were put to a severe trial, and often during its course, had it been in

his power, would he have fled, rather than have submitted to it. He felt the most unqualified disgust at this exhibition of Zulma's violent and unrestrained passion; nor did one single word which she uttered, or one look which she cast upon him, produce the smallest effect in the manner which she hoped. All her animation was met by coldness; to her impassioned words he scarcely gave an answer, and from the fire of her eye he turned away with indifference. He had hoped, that having exhausted herself in the above-described rhapsody, she would have left him; but no, he was destined still to witness another explosion. All her tenderness now turned to anger.

“I hate you! I abhor your very sight! Leave me! odious monster! Go—keep your hated looks to yourself; but I will not live unrevenged. I am not to be despised—insulting and pitiful wretch!—Zulma is somebody here—she has a power which will bring you to the dust of her feet—there you shall grovel and entreat, but she shall—will despise you.”

She continued to rant in this manner until she had wound herself up to phrensy, the cool indifference of Zohrab increasing her violence to a pitch which would have expended itself in some act of assault, had she had means or weapons at hand. At length, as if on a sudden she had been struck by some impelling thought, she threw on her veil, and rushed out of the room with a quick step through the passages of the house; and soon she found herself hurrying forward through the streets she scarcely knew whither. After a while she stopped; and then, more collected, determined, as a last resource, to seek the dwelling of the Dervish, whose name and doings were now the theme of the whole city, and submit her case to his opinion.

Having passed with a rapid step through the various streets of the city which led to his dwelling, she at length reached its humble entrance, and at once made her way to his presence. She found him preparing a still greater quantity of rope than he usually wore round his girdle, and twisting it in various odd knots, with a peculiarly wild and mysterious air. His

whole appearance inspired the maiden with awe ; and at once she found herself deprived of those feelings, almost amounting to madness, which had impelled her to seek him.

He scarcely took his eyes from his work, whilst she stood half advancing, half retreating, at the threshold of his den.

At length, with a scowling glance darting from beneath his overhanging brow, he said, “ Who is that daughter of violence that thus unasked-for entereth a Dervish’s dwelling ? His ways are peaceful ; he abhors the wicked.”

“ As you are a man of God, O Dervish !” said Zulma, with a supplicating accent, “ have pity upon a poor wretch, who in this world has nought to support her misery except it may be your advice.”

“ Speak,” said he ; “ what would ye ? Our ears are open to the afflicted — but woe to the wicked !”

“ What can I say ?” said Zulma ; “ I want your assistance to restore to me that which I have lost. I have been deprived of my only happiness.”

“ Before we converse,” said the Dervish, “ tell me one thing. Are you one of those who see things as they are; or do you see them through one small crack in your understanding, which makes them look all awry—which makes small things look large, and large little — which makes you call happiness what is in truth misery — and which, without considering the feelings of others, makes you look to your own gratification, and your own whims, as the only one unvarying object.”

“ *Wahi! wahi!*” exclaimed the maiden in piteous accent; “ I am a woman, and nothing but a woman. I love with a woman’s love, and hate with a woman’s hate. When I want a thing, I want it violently, immediately, without delay. What I want now must be instant — you must help me — I can take no refusal.”

“ Speak then,” said the Dervish, looking at her with a slow and scrutinizing glance; “ if I can be of use, upon my eyes be it! but beware lest you expect too much from me.”

“ Although you are a dervish, yet still you are a man, and must have a man’s feelings. You

must know too what a woman's feelings are — when all at once she is bereft of what she most desires. I will not detain you by a long story : the fact in short is, I have loved ; and to my full conviction, was beloved in return. I still love, but am not beloved in return. I want to bring back that love, and 'tis from you I require a spell to produce that effect — Do not say nay—quick, quick — give me the aid of your utmost wisdom, and you will not find Zulma ungrateful. Here," said she, tearing off a magnificent armlet, and almost strangling herself to undo her necklace—" here is only an earnest of what she will give."

" Keep your ornaments, woman !" said the unmoved Dervish ; " we seek poverty as our greatest happiness. Possessions corrupt the heart, and are inconvenient to the body. If thou canst add a *ghez* to this rope, then indeed thou wilt confer a favour; but as for thy gold and thy trinkets, throw them to thy pitiful, light-balanced sex."

" But say, as you love the Prophet ! as you hope for a seat in the seventh heaven ! say that

you will assist me," said she: "Come now, wait not, follow me!"

"Hold!" said the Dervish. "Are ye mad? Think ye that a man's mind will change as easily as thine? Will the wind change a minute the sooner because thou pointest to where thou wishest it to blow from? I have my spells, and can ordain a charm; but there are times and places for all things." Then throwing the greatest possible seriousness into his features, and approaching close to the impatient maiden, he said, "Canst thou encounter black midnight, and not fear? When the jackal is afoot, when the dog at his carcase howls, and when the murderer speeds his blow, canst thou meet me — me, the Dervish, with this single rope for his defence, and, like a thief lurking for plunder, steal me unknown into the chamber of your faithless man? If thou canst not, speak no more, and go."

The awe-struck maiden trembled with fear at these words, but recollecting herself at length she said, "Yes, oh yes, I can! I can do all that, and more. You shall enter his door; I will

watch ; and, if it were necessary, I will lay down my life in the attempt. I must have his love, or I die."

" Well then," said the Dervish, "'tis to thee I leave the performance of this. When I am thus brought face to face with him, leave the rest to me. Thy courage and fidelity will have their reward. At midnight we meet here ; not a minute sooner, not a minute later—begone." Upon which he again turned himself to knotting his rope, and mumbling low-spoken words to himself.

Zulma, slowly retreating from his cell, turned the words of the Dervish in her mind, and became perplexed at their strange and mysterious import. " What can he mean?" said she ; " can he be full of wicked intent, murder perhaps ; and does he wish to make me an accomplice in his guilt ? Will he strangle my Zohrab ? Woe is me ! what can this mean ?" Still she recollected the extraordinary reputation which he had acquired ; the astonishing results which had proceeded from his interferences ; and that, happen what might, she would

be in her father's house, where she would be within call of help at a moment's notice. Having at length reached her own chamber, she reflected that it would be wise to have recourse to the Humpback in this emergency, whose advice she had always found highly beneficial, and who would not fail to help her with his counsel. Accordingly she sent for him, and though the hour had already passed when people usually retired to rest, she found no difficulty in bringing him instantly to her call.

"What has happened, Oh, my Khanum?" said he, as soon as he appeared. "The fowls of the air have roosted, prayers have long since been made, we also were going to rest,—you alone are on the watch."

"Hear me!" said Zulma; "there must be no rest for either of us to-night. I must tell you all that has happened to me this evening. I was seated on the terrace looking towards the apartment of the hostage: there was no stir in it whatever; it appeared to me as if he were absent. You know, one can but partially see the tower from where I was seated, and as it

was nearly dark, it is impossible for me to speak with certainty as to what I saw, but, strange to say, I think I could discern something floating in the air, and descending with rapidity as if from the tower. Conceive my astonishment, and — shall I acknowledge it? — my impatience, my rage, my jealousy. I immediately went to him, and, to my confusion, there I found him totally unmoved, as if nothing had happened, professing ignorance of what I myself had seen with my own eyes, and rebutting all my suspicions with derision. Shall I also tell you that I found his soul turned upside down against me? He himself told me that he would not marry me. He rejected me with scorn. He treated me like the dirt on his slippers, and would have shaken me off with the same facility that he would them:—but you know me. What more can I say?”

The Humpback, who did know her, and well, finding that she was beginning to lose her reason and to rave, gradually stopped the incipient passion, and led her to relate all she had done in securing the Dervish's interference. When

she related the manner and the hour in which he was to be introduced to the hostage, the barber lent his whole attention, and his suspicious mind thought he could discover some latent plot. He therefore agreed with Zulma that it would be unwise to leave him entirely unobserved, and it was determined between them that he the Humpback, after Zulma had led the Dervish to the door of Zohrab's apartment, should place himself in such a position as to observe what might take place.

Upon this they parted, and midnight being at hand, the impatient maiden, wrapping herself in the ample folds of her darkest veil, took her way to the Dervish's cell. Ere she reached it, her ears were struck by sounds which indicated any thing but secrecy or precaution. She found him seated on his leopard's skin, on an open spot near his habitation, shouting out ever and anon, in loud though melancholy tones, the sacred *Hou, Hou!* varied by *Allah, ho Ahbar! Allah ho Allah, hou!* and intermixed with an occasional blast of his dolorous-sounding horn, that awoke all the

sympathies of the neighbouring dogs, which howling their sad and ominous responses, excited those of more distant dogs; and thus might be heard in every part of the still city, one long and continual concert of howlings and moanings.

As soon as he perceived Zulma's approach, he arose, threw his leopard's skin over his shoulder, and without saying a word, strided forward towards the house of the chief executioner, followed by his companion. A dim ray of a waning moon shone upon them as they passed along the silent and desolate streets, sufficiently strong to light up his wild and singularly arrayed person. He had swelled the circumference of his girdle to an immense size by a large addition to the folds of his mysterious rope; over this floated his leopard's skin, whilst his heavy spear rested on his shoulder. When they approached the gate of the Ark he stopped short, and coming close to the maiden, said to her — "Upon your head be it if I am stopped — say we come on a business of life and death." As they approached the guard stationed at the

wicket, Zulma, whose person and character were well known to everybody, received a ready admittance as she had before been allowed an exit, and when it was seen by whom she was accompanied, still less was any doubt excited that all was right. They passed on freely, and without let or hindrance entered her father's house, when, instead of taking her path to her own part of the house, she stepped a little out of her way to show the Dervish the entrance to Zohrab's apartment. Having ascertained that, he again stopped, and in a low, though most serious-toned whisper, said—"Well thou hast done thy part; but, mark me!—if I am interrupted in the least, either directly or indirectly, by noise, peepings, or any other symptom of impertinent curiosity, until the very first rays of the sun break forth and strike the turrets of the Ark, the charm is broken—it becomes of no effect, and Allah best knows the consequences which may ensue! for I do not." These words sank deep into the maiden's heart, for she had just planned in her mind where she could best place herself to watch the progress of the spell

which he was about to perform. Now, however, she shrank into herself, and would have willingly given one of her eyes to prevent the Humpback from prying; but it was too late—it would be impossible to find him. She therefore in silence retreated to her own room, there to await the dawn and the results of that upon which was to depend her future happiness or misery.

CHAPTER IX.

Altho' a rope may be my death, yet 'tis life to me now.

ROBBER'S SOLILOQUY.

ZOHRAB was in a profound sleep; — the image of his lovely Amima was occasionally passing in secret visions through his mind. Every delight which the waywardness of a dream could invent was playing through the mazes of his scarcely animate brain, when on a sudden the words “Zohrab! Zohrab!” uttered in a low but most distinct manner, struck his ear. At first they seemed to him to be part of his dream; and as the voice which uttered them, kind and soothing, was familiar to him, he blessed the vision as it spoke, for it reminded him of the voice of his father. Again the sounds struck his ear — louder and still louder. He now, half awake, raised his head from his

pillow, and lent a sort of incredulous ear, as if to ascertain that all was still. “Zohrab ! Zohrab !” again was said, but in a manner that could not be mistaken. The perplexed, half alarmed, half enraptured youth, answered almost involuntarily—“Oh ! my father !—here am I.”

“Zohrab,” said the voice, “arise—let us be gone—thy exile is over—Asterabad is already before us.”

“Oh, Allah !” answered the youth, now entirely self-possessed, “who and what are you ?”

“I am thy father,” said the voice ; “follow—there is death in delay.”

“But where, where are you ? let me embrace your knees ; let thy son claim a father’s blessing.” The door of his apartment, as well as the window, letting in a ray of the moon, whose light was just vanishing, sufficiently lighted up the figure of him who was addressing him, and there, in the person of the Dervish Hezzarpi-chéh, he indeed saw his father. Dressed and metamorphosed as he was, it was impossible even for a son to have discovered his parent ;

but the voice, thrilling through every nerve, and giving fresh life and vigour to his whole being, could not be mistaken. He quickly arose, and threw himself rapturously upon his father's bosom, who, though steadily pursuing his long-planned and hitherto successful scheme, could not repress his paternal feelings, and that one moment of a father's tenderness obliterated the thousand anxieties of many long and tedious days.

"Ask nothing now," said Zaul Khan; "be active, and let us be gone."

In an instant Zohrab put on his caba, girded on his sword, and thrust his *khanjar*, or poniard, into his girdle; but during the time of his hasty toilet something hard fell to the ground, which at that moment he heeded not. This short delay had, however, turned his mind to the one, the all-engrossing thought of his mind, —and Amima's image, in all her loveliness, stood before his bright imagination. He stopped and hesitated.

"Zohrab," said his father, "come!"

"Ah, Sir!" said he, "I know not what I do."

“What !” said Zaul, with impatience in his tone ; “ what sayest thou ?”

“Thy son is not worthy of thee,” said Zohrab.

“Ah !” said the father, “ and wherefore ?”

“The Princess—Amima,” said Zohrab, in a faltering and supplicating tone ; “ how can I go ?”

“I see,” said Zaul Khan, in a voice of anger and resolution—“I see, thou art enslaved by a woman. Now give ear ; I who am thy father speak to thee ; I, who have lived a life of danger and anxiety all to come to this moment, address thee : if thou wilt witness his destruction, that of thy family and friends, the enslaving of thy country,—stay—stay with thy woman ; put on her silken vests, and paint thy cheeks ; but if thou art still that Zohrab I have known thee, the pride of my heart, the glory of our country, then hasten without delay—a single thought more is death.”

Zohrab, with his senses almost in abeyance, with nerves unstrung, irresolute and weak from tenderness of soul and violence of love, at hear-

ing these words, seemed at once to throw off the passing frailty of his nature, and seizing his father's hand, as if he had made a desperate wrench of every affection, exclaimed, " My father, I am yours to life or death !—lead on."

Zaul instantly darted from the room ; but, with all his suspicions awake, as he was about ascending the terrace steps, he thought he saw a form crouched in a corner of the narrow passage : he sprang upon it, and there indeed he found a human being, who, taking advantage of a deeply-shaded nook, was cowering down in deep attention to what was passing.

Seizing him by the throat, he said, " Who are you ? Speak, or you die !"

Zohrab instantly put his hand forward, and feeling a protuberance on the back, immediately recognised the Humpback. " 'Tis the Goozoo !" he exclaimed.

The Humpback, finding himself discovered, without uttering a word, rose to escape, but Zaul, who seemed to have been prepared for every emergency, as quick as thought seized upon his victim, unrolled the shawl from his

waist, secured his whole person by the inextricable folds of the camel-tie, and, with a firm and inexorable hand, forced a handkerchief into his mouth so strongly that no gag ever more completely commanded silence. He then thrust him into the deserted apartment of his son, and, closely followed by Zohrab, immediately ascended the terrace. Having ascertained beforehand what road to take, they scaled the first wall, hastily glided over an adjacent terrace of the chief executioner's house, which was situated close under the city walls, and throwing themselves into a deep shade, took a survey of the nearest watch-towers, in order to discover what sentries might be on the alert. The moon by this time had entirely disappeared behind the lofty Albors; dead stillness reigned throughout the city. "We will wait for the next challenge from the sentries, and then descend," said Zaul Khan. They perceived that within ten yards of the place where they stood, was planted one of the three pieces of artillery which served to guard the citadel, and Zaul, observing that the para-

pet cast a deep shadow inwardly, immediately crept close to it, followed by his son, until he reached the still darker shade of the gun. All at once they heard from the adjacent tower the cry of "*hazir!*" which was echoed and repeated from one tower to the other quite round the battlements; and Zaul said in the lowest whisper, "Be now ready—all depends upon this moment." He then unloosed one end of the long rope that was wound round his body, and lashed it firmly to the gun-carriage; and having waited a certain time to allow the cries of the sentries to subside, "Now, wretches! sleep on," exclaimed he; "ye think ye have done your duty, with your drowsy *hazir* thrown from your throat!—but Zohrab is ours—Allah, Allah protect us!"

Without further delay they both crept through the mouth of the embrasure, and lowering the rope down the side of the fortification, found that nothing could be more just to its measure than its length to the height of the wall. Zaul made his son proceed first, who with cautious step, hand under hand, gradually

descended into the very depths of the dry ditch, and landed in safety ; he followed ; and finding themselves at the bottom, in safety and at liberty, by mutual impulse they threw themselves into each other's arms, and again and again thanked Heaven for their safe deliverance.

It was at this moment that Zohrab, putting his hand to his arm to feel whether the armlet, that sacred gift of his beloved Amima, was safe, found it not there. A deadly apprehension overcame him as he felt over his person, but — he found it not : his agitation was immediately remarked by his father, who said, “ What has happened ? — speak.” “ Oh,” said the grief-struck youth, “ it is lost ; let me return,—she dies if it be found !” He was so overpowered by this thought that he trembled from head to foot, and so entirely unmanned was he, that it was with difficulty he could support himself. “ Whatever it is,” said the inexorable father, “ lost it must be—to return is impossible—let us on !”

“ My father,” exclaimed the youth, “ did you but know all, you would pity and help me.”

“ I do know all,” said the Khan ; “ I would help you—but it is too late—we cannot return—be yourself, my son !”

“ I would give up anything ; but, oh ! what will become of her ?”

“ Zohrab,” said his father, “ again I say, come on—this is not worthy of you.” At length, with difficulty he persuaded the reluctant youth to advance, who, finding that it was now impossible to return, allowed himself to be carried onwards by his father’s impetuosity.

To escape from the depths of the ditch, which was broken and rugged, and easy of ascent in many parts, was the business of a few minutes ; and when once fairly landed on the plain, the father proceeded with a quick step through the cultivated fields, until they reached a certain tree, where, to Zohrab’s surprise, they found a man awaiting them with three horses. Without a moment’s delay they mounted, and were soon in rapid motion on the high road to Mazanderan. Zohrab in other circumstances would have been frantic with joy at finding himself once again on a saddle ; but the loss of

his armlet, which if found in his apartment would compromise the safety of Amima, depressed his spirits, and bore down his mind with the most dismal forebodings. His father said but little, and hurried anxiously onwards, keeping the road during the darkness of night, but striking into the untrodden country as the morning dawned. They travelled without drawing bridle until the close of the succeeding day, when, having passed Firouzkoh, and the well-known passes of the *Teng Shemshir-Bûr*, they struck into one of the deep dells which lead into the forests of Mazanderan.

During their passage through scenes so well known and so deeply impressed upon the mind of Zohrab as those of Firouzkoh and its neighbourhood, what else could occupy his mind but the recollections of her whose image was identified with his captivity, and the recent events of his life? He was riding onwards, entirely absorbed in his own thoughts, the horses of the whole party jaded with extreme fatigue, when their ears were struck with distant shouting. Zaul's face, and that of their attend-

ant (the groom who had conducted the horses) lighted up with joy as they caught the sound.

‘Did you hear?’ said the Khan, as he turned his ear to catch the distant shout—“did you hear that, Reza Kûli?”

“Yes,” said Reza Kûli, “I heard. It must be they; *Khoda shukiur!*—God be praised!”

“Can you see any thing? In the name of Allah look well,” said the Khan.

Reza Kûli’s eyes, like those of a lynx, were not slow in their search, and at length he said, after some hesitation, “Yes, I think I see a horseman on the brow of you hill.”

“I see him too,” said Zaul; “let us on, it is one of their scouts.” Shortly after they heard the report of a musket: “There they are, in truth—’tis well—our luck is on the rise! Praise be to Allah! we have now nothing more to apprehend; ride on.”

Pushing through a tract of thick brushwood, they made their way to some lofty trees, the first of those which fringe the great forest belt that girds the province of Asterabad. Little by little they perceived indications of

a bivouac. At first two or three stragglers appeared ; then a thin blue smoke was seen issuing through the trees ; and at length they came upon a collection of some thirty or forty persons, who, as if by common consent, left their occupations and came to meet them. Some had been tending horses, others lighting fires, others seeking repose, but all now rushed forward in joy. The first person whom Zohrab recognized was his uncle Mustafa, who threw himself into his arms with unaffected transport ; then came the two Turcoman chiefs, who, though less refined in the testimony of their satisfaction, could not rest until they had given him their warmest embrace. Every one seemed more occupied with him than with his father, who partook of the general joy quite as much as if he had taken no part in obtaining his release. Zohrab was affected to tears, to find himself so suddenly surrounded by those so dear to him. Could he have banished from his mind all apprehensions concerning the fate of his mistress, he would have been supremely happy. Every individual present, after his

own relatives and the Turcoman chiefs, came in succession to kiss his hand; he knew most of them by name, and they recollected him as a child. Some had almost seen him born, others younger had been his playfellows, and not even the meanest stable hind was there, who was not known to him in some manner or other. There the whole party stood, backed by the thick forest scenery, in a rugged and picturesque group, feasting their eyes upon him, whilst scarcely any other words escaped their lips, than “*Mashallah! shukiur Allah*—praise to Allah!” with variations of “God grant him protection! We are grateful. Blessings be on the Prophet and the Imans!” and other such-like exclamations.

After their raptures had in some measure subsided, their attention turned towards the extraordinary man who had so ably planned and judiciously executed his son's escape. Standing in the group, still preserving his wild and grotesque costume of the Dervish, although now unencumbered by the mysterious coil, he inspired awe in those who beheld him.

Accustomed as they had been in the city to identify him with the character which he had assumed, they had almost forgotten that he was in fact their chief and their governor; but seeing him now in his true situation, the costume he wore served only as a memorial to remind them of what he had gone through, and of his great merit in the success which had attended his scheme. They approached him with the greatest reverence, the meaner kissing the hem of his garment, whilst the chiefs received his cordial salutation.

Horse-cloths having been spread at the foot of one of the largest trees, the whole party adjourned thither to sit and take refreshment.

The first among them who broke silence was one of the old Turcoman chiefs, Deveh Aga, or the Camel Lord.

“Praise be to Allah!” said he to Zaul Khan, “you have done great things. May your house always be in plenty!”

“By the beard of Omar!” said the Blind Lion, “such another man does not exist in the world. We have done the needful on the

Shah's father's grave!"—at the same time he broke out into a chuckling growl, which was caught up and re-echoed by all the by-standing group.

“*Mashallah, mashallah!*—praise be to God!” said Mustafa Khan, emphatically raising his eyes to Heaven, and placing the back of his hands with the palms upwards on his knees, “we have got our Zohrab again. What have we not undergone! what anxiety have we not felt from that unlucky day when the poor hound breathed his last, to the present joyful meeting! Who would have thought when ruin threatened our home, when our country was about to be visited by the despotism of the tyrant, and our friends to be deprived of their independence, that all at once we should thus again be united, firmer and more resolute than ever to oppose the destroyer, and blessed by the presence of him whom we thought lost to us for ever! And, under Allah and the Prophet! who has done this for us? See, see, O my friends!” pointing to Zaul Khan, “here is the man — this man wiser than Locman,

stronger than Rustam, more generous than Nushirvan—he has conferred these benefits upon us.”

“ *Belli, belli!*” was heard from every mouth. And “ God grant him life!—may the Prophet protect him!—may his son be like him!” and many such phrases, were poured in sincerity into the gratified ears of the adventurous Khan.

“ What words are these?” said Zaul Khan; “ I of myself am nought; give your thanks to that Being from whom all blessings flow. Whatever we have done is the business of fate. We left Asterabad at a lucky hour, and at a fortunate hour we are returned. Our son has been restored to us—what more can we want? In future all our thoughts and endeavours must be directed towards defending ourselves against the Shah, who, enraged as he will be at having been completely foiled, will not fail to attack us as soon as he gathers his forces together.”

“ Let him come,” said the Blind Lion; “ we will bring the whole of the Tekiah in a body against him.”

“ He shall find death behind every tree in Mazanderan,” said the Camel Lord.

Zohrab, who during this conversation had stood before his father, (a custom so grounded in Persian manners that nothing can uproot it,) expressed a hope that he might be told how his extraordinary deliverance had been brought about. To this moment he avowed himself ignorant of everything; for, during the hurry and anxiety of their escape, he could not call upon his father to make explanations. The plan pursued seemed to him so difficult, that, excepting by miracle, he did not conceive how it could have proved so successful. This request was seconded both by the looks and wishes of those present, and they would willingly have postponed taking the rest they so much required, if Zaul, who never allowed himself to be surprised into an imprudent act, had not reminded them that they were not yet in safety, and could not call themselves so until they were within the walls of Asterabad; for he maintained that they might still be overtaken by the Shah’s horse. All he could allow them

to enjoy at present was a short repose, promising, as soon as they had reached their homes, to relate the long narrative of his adventures.

To this they consented, and having placed the proper guards, the remainder of the party were soon entranced in sleep. Long before the dawn, the indefatigable Zaul roused his companions, and again they were on their road through the sloping forests, which, by rapid and dangerous descents, led them from the elevated table land of Irâk into the low plains and jungles which gird the Caspian Sea, and render Mazanderan a country so difficult of access.

At length, having descended the rocky defiles of the shaggy Sandûk, they gradually wound into better paths, until at length they reached the causeway, one of the works of the great Shah Abbas, which kept at a distance the encroachments of the exuberant and rank vegetation.

Zaul Khan, finding that they were now scarcely more than a few hours' distance from

their city, called a halt, and proposed that some one should ride forward to announce their arrival. Every one seemed ready to start on so grateful a service, but none so intensely expressed his desire as Zohrab, to whom every path, and even every tree in the country, were as well known as the faces of his dearest friends. Although his father and friends would have been proud to exhibit him to the inhabitants as they flocked out to meet them, yet so strongly did the desire to embrace his mother show itself, although unexpressed, that at length he was permitted to proceed.

“It is better that it should be so,” said Mustafa Khan; “let him see his mother first, and he will be better able to attend the *mejlis* (the assembly) afterwards.”

The overjoyed youth impelled his horse forward, and threading his way along the nearest paths, soon found himself within sight of his native place. The intense longing which filled his breast to embrace his mother and to see his home, now absorbed every other feeling, and

even the image of his beloved Amima was for a time obliterated.

It was towards the close of day that he reached the city gate, which, although it was now allowed to remain open during the day, was not left unguarded and unwatched. The same old soldier who, as our reader may recollect, had recognized from the wall the faithful hound Hemdum, was seated at the entrance of the drawbridge, and as he observed the approach of a stranger apparently in important haste, he arose and retreated towards the gate itself. But his attention was too much attracted by the horseman's appearance to allow him to think of anything else. His well-trained eye, accustomed to a quick scrutiny of every object requiring watchfulness, at once recognized the well-known form of his young lord. He put up his hands, put them down — would have run forward, then turned about and came back again; his utterance was stopped, his senses seemed bewildered at the apparition, until Zohrab had approached so near that all he could do was to stand stiff

in his place, and open his eyes with a half idiotic, half sensible smile.

“ *Ahi!* Osman, my uncle !” cried out the enraptured youth ; “ is it you ? — don’t you know me ?”

Again he spoke, before the old man could be roused from his astonishment, when running forward, he seized his young master’s hand, and kissing it over and over again, exclaimed, “ *Shukiur Khoda!*—thanks to God ! in truth it is he. Heaven has blessed my eyes once more with your presence. Your place has long been empty ; let me run to the palace.” He would then have preceded him to give the news to the city ; but Zohrab, who like his poor faithful dog was almost ready to drop from fatigue, would not allow himself to be outstripped, and, impelling his tottering horse into his last gallop, reached the gate of his father’s house before he could be announced.

The old porter was acted upon nearly in the same manner as the old soldier had been, by the sudden apparition of his young master ; his bent back almost turned straight, and his

withered eye shot a bright ray, as he saw him dart by, and all he could utter was “*Allah ho acbar!*—God is great!” Zohrab had just time to call to him by name, and rushed onwards to the well-known gates of the harem. His heart beat with a redoubled action as he paused at the threshold, so near to that spot which had witnessed his first entrance into life, and which was endeared to him by every tie and every recollection. He was so affected by the anticipation of all that he was about to witness, that he could scarcely find resolution to proceed. He would have longer continued in this state of indecision, but, perceiving the old porter hobbling towards him with officious affection, he at once drew back the curtain and entered.

CHAPTER X.

There is no virtue in loving a moon face, but the blessing of Allah be upon him who reveres a gray head.

SAADI.

THE scene which presented itself to Zohrab upon his drawing back the curtain was this. In the principal room, opposite to him, with the heavy casements open, was seated his mother conversing with two of her neighbours; on the outside stood a black slave in attendance. In one corner of the court was a servant pounding tobacco; in another were two maidens spinning. The uplifting of the curtain of the harem, being no uncommon occurrence, excited no attention, and it was not until Zohrab was fairly in the centre of the court that his presence was per-

ceived, when those of the women who first caught sight of him, seeing it was a man, uttered a loud shriek, which roused the attention of the rest. It was then that Zohrab's mother, at the first glance, recognized her son, and, forgetting veil, slippers, and acts of courtesy to her guests, almost at one bound she found herself fast locked in his embrace. It would be doing but little justice to the warmth of eastern feelings to attempt their description by words. The uplifted hands, the bursts of exclamation, the reiterated expression of thanks to Allah, the ardent looks of love reciprocated between the parent and the child, the expressive silence, and again a return to vociferous joy, are all too varied, too quick in their transitions, to be described. The feelings of Zohrab and his mother may be conceived in some measure from the former parts of our narrative; and it was long before their first emotions had sufficiently subsided to allow the youth to give an account of his own adventures, and of those of his father and the deputation. It required also a long time for him to meet the inquiries

of the individuals which composed the establishment; for he was almost as much the child of the older servants as he was that of his own parents. The whole city was soon acquainted with the joyful tidings, and from all quarters the inhabitants flocked to get a glimpse of their lost young favourite.

The first act of his mother, after her joy and astonishment were a little abated, was to spread her praying carpet, and return thanks to Allah for the blessing conferred upon her. Her son was not backward in following her example. Although his past life had been so full of adventure, yet the moment he reached the paternal roof he seemed at the same time to return to every habit which was common to it, among which that of a constant reference to the all-wise Providence of heaven was the principal.

Zohrab had scarcely had time to give his mother a short outline of his captivity, and of the circumstances attending its course and its termination, ere her feelings of tenderness were again roused by the arrival of her husband; and then, indeed, with their son before them,

did they heartily reiterate their thanks to Allah, for his restoration.

On this event the city at once assumed a new aspect. Instead of the abandoned and desolate appearance it had presented during the absence of its governor, activity and bustle were infused into its inhabitants. Immediate steps were taken to place it in the best posture of defence. A message was despatched to the encampment of the Turcomans upon the plains of Kipchâk, in order to call in a strong detachment of men to garrison the walls in conjunction with the people of Asterabad. Guards were placed at each gate, and every thing resumed its former warlike and rebellious aspect. Zaul Khan, during his rapid journey from Tehran, had planned a scheme of defence for his city and its territory, the details of which were so familiar to his mind, that without delay he gave his orders for their execution. He knew every pass through the mountains and through the intricate jungles, with all the intimacy of one of its own wild animals, and there he laid his picquets and planned his ambushes.

He ordered the city walls and gates to be examined and repaired. The Turcoman chiefs sent to their different camps, with directions that every provision in corn and rice should immediately be despatched to the city; as many animals as were superfluous were ordered to the plains; and nothing was left undone to meet that attack which it was likely would immediately be undertaken by the Shah.

Zaul Khan, on the day of his arrival, gave a *ziafet* (an entertainment) to all the principal people of the city, as well as to those who had formed the deputation. He exhibited few of the luxuries of the capital; his life was very much like that of his allies, the Turcomans, living in tents and possessors of cattle; but what was wanting in delicacy was made up in abundance. After it was over, and the guests had washed their hands and smoked their first kalioun, he expressed his readiness to gratify the curiosity of the *mejlis* by a relation of his adventures since he had left the city.

Every one present was delighted, and none more so than his son, who stood at a respectful

distance until his father ordered him to be seated, which after some hesitation he obeyed, but at the outermost place and on the very margin of the nummud.

The Khan then began as follows :

“ It will be recollected that on the day of the departure of the deputation from Asterabad, the aspect of the stars was most favourable, and the astrologers asserted that no enterprise was ever commenced under better auspices. We left the gate precisely at the appointed minute ; and let us all allow that, by the blessings of Allah and his holy Prophet ! nothing has ever so completely and entirely succeeded : therefore do not suppose that what I am about to relate of myself is said in self-commendation, for I attribute all to the direction of a higher Power, and therefore I can claim no merit to myself. I will say with Ferdûsi, ‘ O God, whatever I am, ’tis thou that hast made me !’

“ You will remember that when I left you at Toweh under the pretext of illness, I did so in order that the change in my person which I had contemplated might be known to as few persons

as possible. It was known only to Mustafa Khan and two others. As soon as the deputation had proceeded on its road, my first operation was to shave off my beard—that beard which you must all so well remember, and the loss of which I deplored as much as if I had been abandoned by my most intimate friend. This has been the sacrifice which I have most felt since my departure, and I could never have thought that the cutting off a few useless hairs would have cost me such sincere regret. I felt like one deprived of a limb. It was my resource under all circumstances:—if pleased, I stroked it; in anger, I pulled it hard; in heat, it refreshed me; in cold, it kept me warm. But I need not speak of the loves between me and my beard, for doubtless all you who possess one feel the same tenderness towards your own!”

Upon this there was a general stroking of beards throughout the assembly, the two Turcoman chiefs excepted, who could only make play with the four or five bristles which nature had given them at the end of their bony chins.

“ I had allowed the hair of my head to grow

untouched; it had acquired some length already," continued the Khan, "and I encouraged it to hang over my face: those shaggy eyebrows for which I was famous, I also shaved off; and so otherwise did I fashion my features, that I leave it to those who knew me best, to say whether, with the addition of my dervish's garb, my disguise was not complete. It was night when I rejoined the party at the *Teng Shemshir-Búr*, and, when I tried my assumed voice upon almost every individual of the cavalcade, I was happy to find that no one could recognize the tones of Zaul Khan. In short, no scheme of concealment ever succeeded better, and so far I was well pleased with my essay.

"Having reached Tehran, I took up my quarters near the embassy, and soon succeeded in making myself known throughout the city. I frequented the bazars, the maîdâns, and the mosques. I declared myself to be a complete fakir, a *gûsheh nichîn*—a sitter in a corner. My principal doctrine was contempt of life and of the world. I rejected every luxury, and coveted every austerity. With the happy ap-

plication of scraps of poetry, which I appeared to compose impromptu, but which I had arranged at my leisure, I quite took the minds of my hearers by surprise. I was compared to Aflatoon, Socrat, and Locman, by the first mollahs, even to my nose : so true is it, that, in novelty of any sort, either merit or its contrary is exaggerated far beyond its reality. I rejected applications from the Shah to appear before him, and in proportion to the increase of my impudence I rose in the opinion and estimation of the public. In the mean while I lost no opportunity of acquiring information upon every thing which might advance the ultimate object of my scheme. I very soon became acquainted with the situation and the neighbourhood of Zohrab's place of confinement. I learnt the character of those in whose hands he was placed ; every detail of the projected marriage between him and Zulma was made known to me ; and I soon formed a proper estimate of the dangers, physical as well as moral, of his position.

“I naturally expected that on the day of

the audience which the Shah would give to the deputation, when he found I was not present, his anger would be roused, and that we might expect the most serious results from it. I consequently determined to produce myself in my most adventurous act of impudence. Good fortune declared on my side; for on the preceding day I had become acquainted with a Frank mollah, a man who was acquiring great influence in the city, and who by the strange doctrines which he expounded had roused all the *Ullemah* against him. The Shah ordered him to his presence, and, pleased as kings are with a new toy—let it be a new minister, a new palace, or a new mistress—our tyrant was taken with the shorn chin, the close-cut garments, and the strange appearance of this infidel. Among his accomplishments he professed a knowledge of medicine, and as the Shah is very anxious to shelter his person from harm by every means in his power, he applied to him for talismans and nostrums for that purpose. It appears that this sort of Frank is impressed with the strange belief,

that if any man, be he who he may, will but kiss a certain cross, this act is one of the first steps—so he conceives—towards making a convert to his way of thinking in matters of religion. He therefore made the Shah believe that his cross was a talisman, containing within itself the power of preservation from harm, and that, if he would wear it next to his heart, and occasionally kiss it, no harm could ever accrue to him; and the Frank, moreover, informed me, that on that very day the Shah had received such a talisman from his hands, and had inserted it within the folds of his caba. I treasured this fact in my mind, as I did every thing which directly or indirectly might bear upon the Shah's character. The details of our first audience, and that day's events, are too well known for me to repeat. I must own that when the Shah cast his scrutinizing glances upon my face and person, when he began to doubt my veracity, and when he talked of requiring a test of it, my heart began to sink within me, and I despaired of success. But as soon as I observed him put his hand within

his vest, and when, with his hand extended, I heard him require to be told what it contained, the whole extent of my good fortune flashed upon me, the Frank mollah's anecdote came to my recollection, and I believe inspiration came to my help. In four lines I told the King, without his being able to misunderstand me, what his hand contained.

“ I perceived that my triumph was at once effected ; from that moment the Shah placed the greatest confidence in me, although every now and then he gazed on my face with looks of inquiry, as if he recognized my features, in a manner far from satisfactory.

“ Again my good fortune was favourable, for the Shah soon after consulted me upon the health of his niece the lady Amima. Ever since I had heard of the adventure of Zohrab our son at Sawachi, and had ascertained beyond a doubt that he must have spoken to and seen the face of the Princess, I was convinced that they could not have met without feelings of great interest towards each other ; and every thing which I learnt since my arrival at Tehran, confirmed my suspicion. No one could ascer-

tain the cause of her disorder. Previously to my seeing her I visited the Shah's *Hakim Bashi*, or physician in chief, and what he said proved that the seat of her malady was in the mind; for, from all my inquiries, I could not discover that it had affected the body.

“ I soon made up my mind how to act. After I had asked her a few preliminary questions, in order to ascertain whether my suspicions were well founded or not, I at length mentioned Zohrab's name, when at the same time I held her hand. The agitation which immediately ensued proved that I was right; and when I taxed her with loving him, the distressing effects which my words produced told me at once the whole story. Before I left her I determined to ascertain the extent of Zohrab's temptation and danger, in order to judge how much he too might have caught the infection; and, as I drew back the curtain which separated us, I saw her face. Old as I am, the sight of so much beauty, so much loveliness, such softness and modesty, had the effect of enchantment upon me; what, therefore, must it have been upon the feelings of youth?”

The eyes of the assembly were here turned upon Zohrab, whose serious and averted countenance showed how much he was affected and interested by this part of his father's narrative. He would, indeed, have left the room at this passage of it, had he not been too anxious to learn what was in fact of the greatest interest to himself.

His father continued : " I then became convinced of his great danger, and that his confinement as a prisoner and a hostage was but a slight misery compared with the tortures of his unhappy and hopeless passion. I was visited by the Princess's attendant, who, thinking that her mistress might be living under the influence of sorcery or the evil eye, sought from me a charm to destroy it, and a talisman to secure her from harm. Possessed of the knowledge which I had just acquired, I surprised her by forestalling her before she had said a word upon the nature of her errand ; for I had recognized in her attendant one of those who had conducted me to the Princess's apartments on the day of my visit, and thus judged from

her appearance who she might be. I wrote the charm, and used it in furtherance of my scheme to destroy the interest which the Princess took in the fate of our son.

“ The great object which I now had in view was to obtain an interview with Zohrab himself, and hitherto nothing had happened which gave me the least hope. He was watched with the greatest vigilance. Every hint which I threw out to the Shah of the necessity of releasing the oppressed, and Zohrab in particular, was opposed by a very reasonable answer, namely, the necessity of waiting till the arrival of the chief of the deputation. There was one circumstance, however, from which I expected some opening, and I was not disappointed. I knew the whole extent of the love which the chief executioner’s daughter bore to Zohrab, and of her rage and disappointment at being slighted. I was every moment in expectation of being applied to by the despairing maiden to use my powers upon the heart of the cruel youth in her favour; and truly I was not mistaken. I now became so sure that Zohrab’s

deliverance was near at hand, that I took every precaution in my power to forward it. I got acquainted with the King's *mermerbashi*--architect, and from him I learnt the exact dimensions of the walls of the citadel situated close to his apartment. He gave me the height of the wall, and I immediately made more rope, adding to it that which I habitually wore round my girdle, in order to possess a sufficient length by which to secure our escape. It was in the evening after I had returned to my cell, and as I was taken up in plaiting my rope, that a soft step announced a female visiter. The moment she began her narrative I knew who she was, and my measures were soon taken. I now felt that the whole game was in my hands, and I acted accordingly. I sent horses to await us at a certain spot in the plain. I advised Mustafa Khan to get the whole of his party without the city walls, upon various pretences, which might easily be done, considering the liberty which was allowed to them by the Shah; and having done so, to make the best of his way to the place of

rendezvous on the skirt of the forest, which I indicated; and then, putting up a prayer to Heaven for success in this last stage of my enterprise, I boldly met the maiden at the midnight hour which I had appointed.

“Had she been any other but the person she was, so celebrated for her boldness and independence, so privileged to do that which no other Persian maiden would venture to do, the whole of my scheme must have fallen to the ground. She was known and feared by every one. The guards on the watch, the officers of those guards, every person in and out of the royal palace, were acquainted with her person, and obeyed her injunctions tacitly and without hesitation. The only person whom I really dreaded was a certain Humpback, the King’s barber and spy, the most sharp-sighted and malignant of mortals. His observations were so keen, and his deductions so true, that it required all the prudence and foresight of which I was master to combat them; and true enough it was ordained that at the very moment when, with the aid of the Prophet, I thought I had

overcome every difficulty, and that my triumph was complete, when Zohrab and I were passing over the threshold of danger into the high-road of security, this ill-fated imp was found on our path. We were obliged to use violence towards him, for which I expect every return which the wicked ingenuity of his mind is capable of devising; but, *Allah kereem*—God is merciful! *Alhamdulillah*—God be praised! here we are in safety. What more can I say?”

When Zaul Khan had finished his narration, repeated exclamations of “*Mashallah!*” “*Shukriur Allah!*” and “*Alhamdulillah!*” were heard issue from the mouths of the assembly. They were all lavish in their praises of his wisdom, his bravery, and his activity; and well had he earned the satisfaction of having redeemed his son from bondage, and of securing his country against the ill usage of a tyrant’s government! The person who was most open-mouthed in his praise was Mirza Shireen Ali, the moonshee, who had not been permitted to leave Aste-rabad.

“What words can I say?” said he. “In

truth, I am a Persian and a Shirazi, but I never yet heard of such wisdom in the transactions of life ! It is necessary to have been father of all the sages which the history of our country records, to have conceived and executed such an undertaking. Life will leave the head of the King as soon as he hears of the escape of the fortunate Zohrab, our lord and master ; and whose dog is he who will venture to come hither again, either in peace or in war ? In peace his beard will be laughed at ; in war his soul will fly out of his body."

"Is there a doubt about our enemies coming ?" said the Camel Lord, shaking his head at the same time. "Before we can have time to seek winter quarters for our black tents, they will be upon us ; upon that make your mind easy."

"The rains will burn their fathers," growled out the Blind Lion, "if they come at the fall of the year, and they cannot come sooner. Happen what will, we are ready."

"Inshallah !" said Mustafa Khan, "we will

be ready; but let us not deceive ourselves. If the Shah comes, it will be in great strength. If ever our energies are to be called forth, it is now. Every man must be a Rustam, every horse a *Sheb deez*. Our preparations must commence this very day; and seeing what has already been performed by our chief, who is there that will not place unlimited confidence in him? And see, instead of one head we have two. With such protectors, under Allah! who need despair?"

Zohrab, in the mean while, had not said a word; his mind was too much buried in thought, and he had too much respect for his father and the customs of his country, to offer, unasked, his advice upon the present position of the affairs of his family and country. He had still much to say to his mother, for whom he entertained a more than filial affection, and he therefore entreated his father's permission to retire. As soon as he was gone, Zaul Khan said, "Our friends must forgive us, if the youth, who has just received our permission to retire, gives not up his heart

to our affairs so ardently yet as we could wish. He had a thousand pangs to combat, which time alone will assuage. What I have said during the course of my narrative will sufficiently explain what I mean. It is impossible to turn midnight into noonday, except by patience; but let the day come when energy to obstruct a foe is required, and bravery to face danger, and I will engage this poor head that our son does not show himself in the least backward to meet the approaching storm."

"What words are these, Zaul Khan!" said the Camel Lord; "sorrow must have its course, like the mountain torrent; it rages at first, overflowing its banks—it gradually lowers into a moderate stream, and then flows on doing all proper good. Shall we ever forget that youth in the *chappows* of former times! Such a man of the sword has not been seen in Irân since the days when the white devils were to be killed in our forest, and since the slaying of the giant Koulzum."

"With Zohrab at my side," said the Blind

Lion, "I care not for a thousand Shahs, and his *zamburek* and cannon to boot. What can they do in this wilderness of wood, where men must go by single files through passes narrower than a camel's mouth, bordered by trees from which guns may be fired as quick as puffs from a *kalioun*?"

Nothing, indeed, could be better than the spirit which Zaul Khan found to exist among his followers and the people of Asterabad in general. Every one seemed willing cheerfully to make every sacrifice rather than submit to the Shah, and appeared anxious to second any measure of defence which he proposed. Mustafa Khan, who was as keen a politician as his brother, though not endowed with the versatility of his talent, his enterprise, or strength of character, had, during his stay in the capital, secured by presents and address the friendship and good-will of many of the principal men about the court, and there was every probability that, should the King lead his forces against Asterabad, much advantage might be gained from their interference.

Thus fortified in every way did they set about the work of defence with the greatest alacrity ; and zealous in their endeavours to prepare for the Shah's reception, we will for the present leave them.

CHAPTER XI.

A man's mouth may be too full, as one may have too much of happiness. TURKISH SAYING.

ZULMA had passed a wakeful night in her own apartment, expecting the dawn with all the fever and anxiety of a lover awaiting the moment of meeting. Too impatient to stay until the sun was actually risen, she crept without noise to her favourite terrace, in order, if possible, to catch any sound from which she might draw some omen favourable to her passion. The morning was still as death. She lent a quick ear to the hostage's place of confinement—she could perceive no trace of the Dervish, but a strange noise struck her. It was as that of some one choking, or practising the first act of expectoration, accompanied by some shuffling of feet

and struggling. She listened again and again, turning first one ear, then the other, drawing back the long tresses which hung about her face, and at each moment uttering a faint exclamation of surprise.

The noise rather increased than diminished. "What can have happened?" said she to herself; "can the monster have harmed the youth!" Still, in her superstitious fear of disturbing the operation of the charm, she ventured not to stir, but remained fixed, alternately watching the tinges of the sky and the rising sun, and listening to the uncouth sounds which came from the chamber below. Her mind was gradually working up into a state of apprehension, that, through her interference and the agency of the Dervish, she might have been the means of producing some dire mischief, and that the hostage's existence might be at stake. At length losing all patience, she determined at once to clear up her doubts. One great snort, which she heard as she rose to go, quickened her steps, and in a short time she found herself at the door

of the mysterious chamber. There, lending an attentive ear, all her fears were confirmed. The choking, grunts, and struggles had increased to a frightful degree, and she could not but conclude that her lover was at his last gasp. She threw open the door, which had been carefully closed; and there, although the curtain over the window was lowered, she discovered, not the beautiful youth of her heart, but the pinioned Humpback. Such was the transition from apprehension of evil to the certainty of security, that her first impulse was to break out into immoderate laughter; and, indeed, the object before her was well calculated to excite it. He was rolling about the room, performing feats similar to those which one may have seen a beetle perform on the high road when struggling with a ball. His head, knees, shoulders, and hump, seemed all brought together into one knotted mass, bound so ingeniously together that the hands could in no manner perform their office, whilst the feet having been placed from off their perpendicular, could no longer be of use as a pedestal. His hideous face was distorted

out of all shape, every feature of it being thrown into a wrong place. The mouth was distended in so extraordinary a manner, that it looked as if it were the orifice of a dirty clothes-bag over-filled; whilst the eyes, naturally small at the best, had almost totally disappeared. What with struggling, what with his efforts to expel the gag, the poor wretch had changed his colour from its own ghastly yellow to a livid purple; and it is probable that, had not Zulma come to his rescue, he could not have lived through the day to tell his own tale. Though convulsed almost into hysterics, she ran to him, and as with one jerk she wrenched the horrid rag from his mouth, she had the pleasure of seeing his jaws come together again with a lively snap. It was then that he began to roar and draw largely upon his lungs, feeling pleasure in once again putting those vital parts in motion which had almost been suspended. During these preliminaries she sought for the end of the bandage which was wound round him, and at length, with the utmost difficulty, succeeded in loosing one hand, and then the other, until at length she released

him altogether. From a state of vigorous irritability, the exhausted Humpback now lay almost inanimate, uttering ever and anon in low-drawn moans the following words:—"Ahi, they with burnt fathers!—Ahi, those procurers!—Ahi, they with improper mothers! I have defiled their fathers' graves!—Curses be on their sisters' progeny, and on their mothers' too! See what they have done!—they have killed me!—I am a done man! Where can I run to, to drink their blood? Please Allah, please Allah! there is still time;—give the Goozoo a world to work in, and he will find ye out!—Ah, ye wretches, whose fathers are burning in jehanum!"

When he had come to himself, and he could pay attention to his deliverer, he related all that had befallen him. She was persuaded in her own mind that the ill success of the charm was owing to the interference of the Humpback—a warning which she had previously received from the Dervish; and she was therefore slow in believing the facts which the injured man asserted.

“ This was predicted to me,” said Zulma ; “ the Dervish assured me, if any one interfered, the charm would be broken.”

“ What dervish ? what charm ? ” exclaimed the angry barber ; “ why will you go so far out of your way to believe such balderdash ? He was no more a dervish than I am an angel, and possessed no charm beyond the power of uttering falsehoods of the largest dimensions. Open your eyes, as you love Allah !—you are neither a child nor an ass ;—see your error. That ill-born knave was no less a person than Zaul Khan, father to the unsainted Mazanderani boy. They are both fled. Their last act was to bind ill-fated me into one unmanageable lump, and leaving me with a mouthful of rag, and my legs and arms bound tighter than those of a new-born babe, they turned their backs upon the beard of the Shah, and ere this are, no doubt, half way to Asterabad. But let it be—I am the Goozoo. If there is a path for a snake through the woods of Mazanderan, the Shah’s army shall find it ; and if there be one dog of them alive this day six months—

one mother's child of the whole race of Astera-badis—then say that the Humpback has a face free to be spit upon by every fool in Persia.”

The disappointed and dejected Zulma now gradually began to undeceive herself; and the illusion in which she had allowed herself to live, dropped from before her understanding like scales from the eyes.

“And is it so indeed!” said she; “am I awake, or do I still dream? Have I, you, the Shah, the whole city, been really thus deceived? And by whom! by a wretch who has laughed at us one after the other, taken us in, reviled us, showed us that we are fools, children in cunning and craft, when compared to himself. *Ahi wahi!*” said she, “where shall I go? what is to be done?” whilst rage filled her breast, and convulsed her features.

For some time did these two worthies sit opposite to each other, ruminating in silence over the trick which had been put upon themselves and their nation, and lashing themselves up to plan and resolve acts of the most unbounded revenge. They tortured their thoughts to dis-

cover who could be their accomplices in the court and city ; for to suppose that such a system of deceit could have been carried on without many accessories were folly, next to an impossibility. As the day advanced and illumined the apartment in which they sate, they cast their eyes about, hoping to find some clue whereby to clear up the mystery of Zohrab's flight ; but, saving the books and clothes which he had left behind, they could discover nothing. However, as Zulma rose to go, near the threshold of the door her foot struck against some hard substance. She stooped down, and picking it up discovered it to be the armlet which Amima had given to Zohrab at their parting, and which had dropped from him as he was leaving his apartment. " See," said she to the Humpback, " what I have found ! Can this be Zohrab's, or his father's ? What a beautiful bazubend !"

The barber took it into his hand, and had scarcely looked upon it when he exclaimed in astonishment, " What do you say ? Wonderful ! wonderful ! Zohrab's or his father's indeed ! How could such dogs have possessed

such a treasure? It is the lady Amima's, as I am a true believer!"

"The lady Amima's!" cried Zulma, the fire of jealousy blazing forth in every feature. "How came it here?"

"Every suspicion which I have long entertained," said the Humpback, with a thoughtful look, accompanied by an extra-satanic grin, "is now confirmed. See, see! World, what art thou! I said that she loved him; the secret is out; this explains all. *Ahi* Sadek! *ahi* Mariam! and all ye accursed set! let us now see what will become of ye all, your insolence and your boasted power! We must go to the Shah; there must not be a moment's delay."

"But say," said the agitated Zulma, "what is the truth? How does this jewel explain the secret?"

"These emeralds, long made into armlets and worn by the kings of Persia, belonged to the lady Amima's father, and, when he was put to death, were taken possession of by the Shah; it is not very long since he presented them to his niece. I know them well; they have fre-

quently passed through my hands, and it was only a few days ago, when I last visited the Princess, that I saw this very ornament upon her arm."

"Then it must have been Zohrab Khan in person," exclaimed the maiden, as if a ray of conviction had flashed across her mind, "whom I saw descending from the turret."

"Without a doubt," said the Humpback coolly. "Khajeh bashi! fool! dolt! you have brought your foul old carcase to a pretty market; rare work we shall have for the whole of our head-cutting tribe!"

Zulma, taken up only with the loss she had sustained in her lover, and burning to satisfy her revenge against her rival, little heeded the danger to which either herself or her father was exposed from the King's wrath; for Zohrab had been placed under his charge, to his care was committed the custody of his person, and he would be answerable for his loss. She could contemplate nothing but the destruction of Amima. The possession of the armlet found in Zohrab's room, with the corroborating circumstance of his descent from the terrace, acted

as soothing balm to her seared heart. Without these proofs, so strong was the hold which the Princess had upon her uncle, that it would be impossible to convince him of her guilt. Any common conspiracy against her would only fall upon the heads of the plotters, but now it would be impossible to disprove facts such as those which she and the Goozoo possessed, and she felt that revenge was already in her hand.

It was necessary, however, in order to skreen themselves from blame, that Zulma and her accomplice should make up some plausible story, which might wear a character of truth, and be easily received as such.

“What shall we say for ourselves,” said the Humpback, “when the Shah asks how and where we found the armlet? It is all very well to get one’s neighbour’s head cut off, but at the same time let us secure our own.”

“*Ahi!*” said Zulma, “let me but see her torn into a thousand pieces, I care not what happens to me; death is preferable to life under circumstances such as these.”

“For the name of Allah!” exclaimed the

alarmed liar, "do not talk thus: recollect that I have no rival!—that I am no lover!—that I entered into this business solely and entirely to please you! Do not let the innocent suffer for the guilty. What can we say to the Shah?"

The maiden sat in moody silence, her heart torn by a thousand contending emotions; the more she thought of her loss — of all that had taken place, and which had deprived her of Zohrab, the less she cared for her own safety. But her crooked companion was sorely put to his invention to fabricate the protecting lie that was to secure his own head. He began to feel of how much more consequence to him his own carcass was than that of his fair neighbour, and putting her, her father, and his family, out of the question, he thought of nobody but himself.

"Tell the truth," said Zulma, "tell exactly how it happened," excited by her reflections into a state of heroic indifference. "I care not for the consequences. Whatever is, so be it."

"Tell the truth, indeed!" exclaimed the Humpback, in a lengthened tone of astonishment. "Are we mad? has sense taken leave of

our brains? Shall we increase the imputation of being asses which the Dervish has thrown upon our heads, by continuing to be so? No, no! if ever ingenuity was wanted, 'tis now. 'A lie which gives security, is better than truth inducing strife,' said the sage Sheikh. He said well—well did he say—and by the beard of the Prophet so we will act! Let me see, what can we devise? I have found it—I have it—thus. In the first place, what is the use of saying that you went to seek the Dervish? Why publish your weakness to the world? Why invite every cow with a beard to laugh at you?"

"Hold!" cried Zulma; "speak, but do not increase my misery by odious words thrown into my face."

"Therefore we will simply say," continued the barber, "that I heard a rumour in the city that a more than ordinary stir had been remarked among the Asterabadis and the Turcomans; that many of them had been seen issuing from the gates of the city; and that consequently, in order to ascertain the safety of the hostage, I proceeded to the place

of his confinement, which I found open and vacant — that there was every appearance of his having made his escape—and that on searching his apartment this armlet was found. In corroboration I will say, that he was seen from the terrace of your father's house descending from the Princess's turret. Have I said well?"

"Say what you like," said Zulma: "let them take our souls from us; I care not."

Astafferallah, God forbid!" exclaimed the Goozoo. "Life is sweet, and without it how shall we enjoy the revenge which we are about to take. Mashallah! there is still much happiness left for us. Why should you be thus cast down? Light of my eyes, open your heart."

"Happiness!" exclaimed the afflicted Zulma with a sigh. "Whatever you may feel, I know and care not—but happiness is lost to Zulma for ever."

"But recollect," said the barber, "nothing must be said of the state in which I passed the night; it must not be known how effectually my mouth can be stopped, lest on future occasions such a method may again be adopted.

It must not be whispered how securely I was bound, and how oft I rolled over and over on this floor; the city would not cease laughing from this till the end of time. May its liver descend and its soul be dried up! But see," said he, "the sun is up; I must be gone, or the Shah will be enquiring for me; he is up too. Now be collected—drop your midnight excursion—say nothing of gags and bandages—and only wait till you are called upon to swear that you saw Zohrab descending from the turret. Go now, in God's name go! or else we shall be found here together, and then who can save us?"

This truth effectually roused the disconsolate Zulma, and without saying a word more she left the apartment, and reached her own room unobserved; whilst the barber took his way to the palace to perform his usual morning operation upon the person of his royal master.

In the mean while a strange commotion and stir had taken place among the *kechekchis* or guards of the city gates. It had, in fact, been remarked that many Asterabadis and Turcomans, by two

and three at a time, had left the city, and that they had not been seen to return : this circumstance had been reported at early dawn to their general, one of the highest officers about the court. He had no sooner heard it than, in great alarm, he mounted his horse and rode straight to the abode of the deputation. To his utter surprise, he found it untenanted ; no trace of either chiefs or subalterns, Asterabadis or Turcomans, was there, save some *yaboos* and mules of no consequence, kitchen utensils, and some heavy baggage, with which it would have been dangerous for them to have been encumbered. All their famous horses were gone. In short, it was plain that they were fairly off. It was suggested that they might have received permission from the Shah, or his Vizir, to go to the *Ziaret** at Shah Abdul Azîm ; and happy at a gleam of hope, the general of the guard immediately despatched a horseman to that village to make the proper enquiries. It would require about an hour to go and return, and during that time

* A famous place of devotion near Tehran, the shrine of a saint.

he made up his mind to sit upon the carpet of patience, and smoke the kalioun of expectation. It was suggested also, that enquiries ought to be made of their mehmander Shir Khan Beg, who probably might be better acquainted with their movements than any other person. A message was instantly sent to him, and before the general could smoke his second kalioun, this self-important personage appeared.

When the first ceremonies had been performed, the general said, "How is this, Sir Mehmander? Your charges have disappeared; can you give us any account of them?"

"What words are these?" said the consequential Beg. "My charges! I am neither their slave nor their servant, nor placed as a watch over them," looking significantly at the general. "The Shah has confided the whole of the negotiations into my hands. Those who have wit are called upon to use that wit; those who have eyes only, and no wit, are called upon to use those eyes. Shir Khan Beg, after all, is not a *gholam shah* for nothing," said he, looking

with complacency over his well-dressed and, we will add, well-made person.

“ Say what you will,” said the general, “ you will not make me believe that words have no meaning. Mehmander has a signification or it has not. It implies one who has the care of guests, or I do not know my own tongue. How then can he have the care of them if he be ignorant whether they exist or not? By what account do you calculate?”

“ By what account, indeed !” said the enraged gholam ; “ can I sit at every gate in the city to watch their movements, and be in seven places at once ? No lynx ever did that, with all its eyes ; none but a general of kechekchis can do it, who, instead of taking his rest on the soft cushions of his anderoon, ought to be ever on the stir ; awake to every thing, and with all his numerous guards at command, no mouse ought to creep out of the walls of Tehran without his being apprised of it.”

“ What words are these, you little man ?” said the general, whilst the pride of a Kajar mounted

into his head. "Will you teach me my duty? you, who are scarcely wise enough to keep your horse and musket in order, and gallop after the Shah! Go, go, Sir! seek your cows of Turcomans and Asterabadis, and let us know why they are absent."

"I am not your servant," said Shir Khan with a disdainful look, at the same time drawing up his handsome moustache to the corner of his eye; "I have no account to render to any one save to the Shah;" and upon that he arose in great form, and said, "May Allah take you into his holy keeping, and may your shadow never be less!"

He was not, however, in the least easy in his mind at the absence of his charges, for such they were, and his apprehension was much increased when he heard from the returning messenger, that they were not to be found at Shah Abdul Azîm, nor any village in that direction, but that, on the contrary, peasants had reported in the market-place, that they had been seen on the road to Mazanderan, travelling with every appearance of haste. Indeed, every one

who was in the least connected with the care of the Asterabadis and Turcomans began now to have fearful apprehensions of the results that might accrue to them from the Shah's violence in consequence of this unaccountable event. The general of kechekchis was slow in making up his mind to the necessity of informing the Grand Vizir of what had taken place; and Shir Khan Beg himself, who foresaw all the disasters likely to fall upon the many individuals upon whom the anger of the King would be sure to alight, was far from not placing himself among that number, however advantageously he might think of his own precious person.

The commotion increased as the day advanced. It became generally known throughout the city, and all those who had relations of business with the individuals of the embassy, were seen running to and fro to the place which they had inhabited; some alarmed lest they should not be paid their dues, others delighted at having got rid of their creditors. It was expected that the whole matter would be made known to the Shah at the great selam at noon,

and that those who were to blame would then be punished. Everybody, in the contemplation of such violence, looked melancholy, and was afflicted by dismal forebodings; for when once the anger of the Shah was roused, no one, innocent or otherwise, could at all be certain that the blow might not alight upon his own head.

CHAPTER XII.

Your place is empty !

PERSIAN COMPLIMENT.

THE Humpback entered the Shah's apartment with a cautious and timid step, as he usually did, but, instead of approaching at once to take possession of the head upon which it was his duty to operate, he stood aloof, throwing a most dolorous expression into the cast of his features, and putting his hands before him as if he would speak before he began to work.

“ What has happened ? ” said the Shah.

“ *Hitch*, nothing,” answered the Humpback ;
“ your slave is waiting for a favourable moment.”

“ What words are these, varlet ? ” exclaimed the Shah ; “ is the fool mad also ? ”

“ Were your slave mad, it would be well

for him," said the barber. "A thing has happened——"

"And suppose it has, what then?" said the King; "is every fool in our kingdom to make a long face because a thing has happened?—Speak."

"As I am your sacrifice," said the Humpback, "the Mazanderani——"

"What of him?" said the King quickly; "he won't marry the executioner's daughter, we know that—so be it. Let him wait till his father's arrival."

"He will not wait," said the other, in a low and subdued tone.

"Not wait!" said the Shah, in an angry voice. "Are ye all mad? To-day he waits, to-morrow he won't wait—what words are these?—is this to be told the Shah?—explain."

"He will not wait, because he is gone," said the Humpback, looking with great scrutiny at the Shah's turn of countenance as he spoke the last three words.

"Gone!" repeated the King: "whither is he gone?"

“ As I am your humble sacrifice,” said the barber, “ his room was this very morning found empty, and he is supposed to have fled the city.”

“ How — when — where? speak !” said the King, his anger kindling as he uttered the words.

“ The representation of the less than the least to the asylum of the world, is this:—Late in the day of yesterday, your slave heard that many of the Asterabadis and Turcomans had been observed issuing from the gates of the city ; and this morning it struck him that there might be something more than common in this, and, as a precautionary measure, your slave determined to ascertain whether the hostage was in safety. Your slave went to his apartment, and to his surprise he found it vacant—there was every appearance of his having taken his departure ; but how and whither is still unknown to your slave.”

“ And the Asterabadis and the Turcomans,” said the King, “ what of them ?”

“ As I am your sacrifice, they are gone too,” said the barber.

“Where is the wild Dervish—the Dervish Hezzarpicheh?” said the King, as he put on a thoughtful look.

“By the head and salt of the Shah!” said the barber, “I know not; it did not strike your slave to inquire.”

“Here *bachchah*, children,” the Shah roared out to his attendants, upon which Sadek appeared, to whom he addressed himself—“Go to the cell of the Dervish, and bring him hither without a moment’s delay. Let the Prime Vizir, the chief executioner, and the head of the guard, be at hand. Let the King’s scarlet cloak be in readiness, and see that a full band of *ferash ghazeb*, executioners, be in attendance at this day’s selam.”

The blood ran cold through the persons of his hearers as these words struck their ears, for well did they know what they portended. Sadek made his exit with all haste to execute his orders, but the Humpback was destined to witness the lighting up of the fire of which he had laid the fuel. The dropping of the under jaw, the twitching of the mouth, the uplifting of the brow, and the vibration of the ears, all indi-

cated the gathering of the storm ; and come it did with a vengeance truly terrific."

" And I have been weak enough," said the Shah to himself, in a low and growling tone, " not to give heed to my suspicions. If we have indeed been laughed at, let those who laugh now look to themselves !"

The barber stood in fear before him, watching the uprising of his anger, uncertain whether or not he should be allowed to proceed in his morning's operation ; he very soon saw, however, that until the fury of the storm had spent itself, it would be madness to put himself in its way.

Sadek soon returned, and stood before his master.

" Has the Dervish been found ?" said the King ; " where is he ?"

" As I am your sacrifice," answered Sadek, " he is not in his cell, and no one has seen him."

" It is even as I thought," mumbled the King to himself : " this must have been Zaul in person ; no other man in Persia could have done this. Cause an instant search to be made for

him and the hostage Zohrab, throughout the city," he roared out in angry tones. "Let the country around be scoured in every direction, and send a strong detachment in the direction of Asterabad, and let every man who may be on the road be brought before us."

The ordinary mode of transacting business was, that each head of departments should receive their orders from the King himself; but on such occasions as the present, when the more persons he saw, the more he was anxious to proceed to punishment, Sadek himself, with that lurking principle of good which at times bestirred him, undertook to be the dispenser of the royal commands. The whole city and surrounding country were soon thrown into active search, and consequently scenes of injustice and cruelty took place, which are unknown excepting in the abodes of despotism. Every house was forcibly invaded, extortions ensued, private revenge found its opportunity, and a general fear and insecurity pervaded the whole community.

In the mean while, the Prime Vizir, the chief

executioner, and the head of the royal guard, severally appeared before the Shah; and it was not long before every great officer of state was assembled at the royal gate, in readiness to answer questions, and to await the royal pleasure.

By this time the whole scheme of Zaul Khan for the rescue of his son had flashed across the Shah's mind, and he saw in the most vivid colours the extent of the trick which had been put upon him. That which at any other moment would have excited his utmost admiration, now only served to work up his feelings to the highest pitch of irritation. He was accustomed to look upon himself as the most quick-sighted and penetrating of human beings; what then was his mortification to find himself thus completely outwitted, and by one whom he so entirely despised! The feeling was maddening to the highest degree—he could scarcely keep his wrath from falling upon the whole city at once, so enraged was he at the situation of a dupe in which he thought he was placed. He fancied that he could detect the whole of

his subjects laughing at and exulting over him, and in his mind's eye saw every man's finger pointed at him in derision.

The respect which he paid to his Grand Vizir restrained him from using violence towards his person; but the moment he saw the chief executioner and the head of his guard, he fell upon them with the ferocity of a tiger. Without asking them a single question, he roared out to the ferashes in attendance—" *Bezun, bezun !* strike, strike these ill-begotten varlets;" and before they could make the smallest remonstrance, they found themselves on their backs, their feet in the air, and showers of blows from green poplar-sticks pouring upon them. Most unluckily for them, as soon as the Shah had waved his hand to cease, Sadek stood before the King holding a coil of rope in his hand.

"What is that?" said the King.

"As I am your sacrifice," said Sadek, "this was found tied to a gun near the house of the Nasakchi Bashi, and suspended from the wall into the ditch."

"It is the Dervish's," said the Shah; "of

that there is no doubt. Let all further search cease ; it is now plain whence he and Zohrab made their escape." Then turning to the culprits who had been punished, he said,—“ Do you see this? From the house of one he escapes, and under the very nose of the other he scales our castle, and laughs at our beard. Dogs’ sons ! is it thus ye do the King’s business ? Lay on again, in the name of Allah !” he cried out to the ferashes ; “ and mind ye ! the Shah is looking at you.” Upon which the poor men were again put to the torture, nor did this cruel operation cease until they were carried away insensible from the presence of the tyrant.

At every moment some new report was made to the King, which kept up his anger, and excited him to further violence. At length it was said that the Dervish, in company with a woman, had been seen after midnight walking towards the chief executioner’s house. This roused all the Humpback’s attention, and he immediately felt that, should this fact be investigated, he would be implicated, and then indeed what fate would be his !

The Shah ordered that the man who had seen the Dervish so accompanied, should be brought before him; when one of the guards, a rough man, more dead than alive, a livid paleness showing itself under the roughest of beards and the most hairy of faces, was thrust forward and stood before the King.

“Who are you?” said the Shah.

“What do I know?” answered the poor man in a state of utter amazement.

“As I am your slave,” said Sadek, seeing the unfortunate creature’s disturbed state, “he is a kechekchi.”

“What did you see last night?” said the King.

He endeavoured to stammer out some prefatory expressions of humility, but utterly failed, and at length said—“I saw the man of God and a woman.”

“Why did you not seize them? Can such people walk about at night with impunity in my city? Mirza Hajji Ibrahim,” turning round to his Grand Vizir, “what news is this? The orders of the Shah are looked upon as nothing.”

“As I am your sacrifice,” said the Vizir, “there has been great neglect of duty.”

“Why did you not seize them, O little man?” said the King to the keshekchi.

“What do I know?” answered the bewildered wretch; “I was afraid.”

“Mashallah!” roared the King, his eyes firing with rage: “wonderful servants have we!—And who was the woman?”

At this question the Humpback began to feel very unsafe.

The poor keshekchi, having mustered up a little courage, answered: “As I am your sacrifice, I believe it was the *Bibi Nasakchi*—the lady executioner.”

“In the name of Allah! who?” exclaimed the Shah.

“As I am your slave,” said the Humpback, who found it high time to speak, “he means the Begum Zulma, the chief executioner’s daughter; but that cannot be, as I know she was in her own anderoon at that hour. It has come to your humble slave’s recollection, that perhaps what he found in the hostage’s room

when he visited it this morning, may throw some light upon the enquiries of the asylum of the world." Upon this he drew forth from his bosom the armlet.

The Shah had no sooner received it into his own hand, and cast his eyes upon it, than his whole nature seemed to undergo a quick revulsion. It was his turn now to tremble — but it was the tremor of jealousy, of rage, of abhorrence, of maddening fury. Breathing short, and evincing much prostration of strength, he said slowly to the Humpback, "So you found this in Zohrab's room?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said the crafty wretch, "I did."

"And where?"

"Near the youth's pillow," answered he, with a significant look. The King drank these words as if poison had been mixed with them. He said nothing. His head sank dejectedly on his breast. Every sort of feeling, from the deepest tenderness to the most deadly revenge, ran in quick succession through his frame. At one moment his beautiful and retiring

niece stood before his imagination in all the modesty of her nature; at another he saw her in the arms of his young prisoner, whilst he felt that he himself was the object of their derision. It was but a short time since with his own hands he had given her the armlet, which had belonged to her father:—to find it restored to him in this manner, and with this story attached to it, was more than he could bear. His first impulse was to order instant execution upon her who had excited his wrath; but so malignant were his present feelings, that he seemed to have pleasure in dwelling upon them, in order that he might devise a more sweet and perfect revenge. The pause, the awful pause, which ensued during these his cogitations, was felt by those present as if they stood on the verge of eternity—as if they were awaiting the signature of their death-warrant, so sure were they that none but the most dire results could accrue from the delay. The eyes of all present were turned towards the dreaded awarder of their fate in deep and breathless silence; it seemed as a mockery of their misery, if even the

leaves of the surrounding trees were agitated by the breeze, or the splashing fountains threw out their refreshing waters.

At length, rousing himself from his apparent stupor, like the deadly boa rising from torpor and preparing for a fresh victim, he wreaked the first effects of his rage upon the poor keshekchi. "Strike his neck!" he roared out to the full extent of his terrible voice, as he looked upon the offender. "Go, and let others know what it is to be negligent of the Shah's affairs."

Upon this a *ferash ghazeb*, a most ferocious monster, stepped up, and with one blow of his sword severed the wretched man's head from his body.

We will spare our readers the horrid acts of cruelty which succeeded this iniquitous execution. After he had begun the exercise of his power in his inner apartments, the tyrant transferred himself to the great Dewan Khaneh, at his usual mid-day hour of giving audience, called the *Selam i Aum*, and there, clothed in his blood-coloured cloak, gave full scope to the

sanguinary dictates of his nature. — It would be shocking to the feelings of those who only hear of executions after long and tedious investigations and in solitary and marked instances, to be told the numbers of innocent as well as guilty persons who, almost without a reason, and all without a hearing, fell under the suspicions and the consequent death-stroke of this odious King. But let it not be thought that his subjects thought the worse of him for thus using his power. Instead of exciting feelings of opposition to his rule, he only the better secured his authority. It is true they would call him a *shaitan*—a devil, a blood-drinker, a despot, but then at the same time they would add the epithet *ajaib*—wonderful, which in most of their minds would also imply “admirable.” “*Ajaib Shahi*, wonderful King!” would they say of him. “If you want a lord of the sword, look to him : our King is indeed a king. Whose dogs are the Muscovites before him? You may talk of the Franks, their discipline, and their artillery : we spit upon their fathers’

graves." Thus the Persians would rave in praises of their sanguinary King; and in this instance those who did not come under his displeasure were all in favour of him, inasmuch as they felt that in fact he had cause for the exercise of his severity.

Among others, our garrulous friend the boasting Mehmander had hitherto escaped observation, and standing in the midst of his companions, having thrown his cap more than usual upon the side of his head, and thrust his shawl well over his hips, said: "This is what I call in truth being a king. Were I a king, I also would look upon men's heads as dirt;—*bah! bah! bah!*" said he, waving his hand horizontally, "how I would cut them off! I have a way of my own for cutting off heads. Of what use are guards if they do not keep watch? And that buffalo their chief too, who pretended to teach me my duty; well did he eat the stick this morning! Well done, King—*barikallah!* We Persians are demons without the stick;—what should we be with one of your quiet kings? Only put me at the head of the guards, see

what I would do ! Make me Nasakchi bashi ; Mashallah ! more feet should be beaten in a day than there are now in a week !”

He was going on at this rate when a ferash came up to him, and said, “ The Shah wants you.” At these words his cap almost by itself returned to its unpretending perpendicular position, his hands left his arrogant hips, and with paleness on his cheek, and a certain laxity in the back sinews of his legs, he slowly followed his conductor. “ Allah take you into his keeping !” said one, in a titter. “ Wonderful King is ours !” said another. “ If I was a king, men’s heads should be like dirt !” said a third. All this did not console him ; and when he stood in the presence of his royal master, he felt that he would much rather be in the presence of a Russian battery. His principal protection on this occasion was the Shah’s own favourable feeling towards him ; for although he was a vain boaster and an impertinent babbler, the Shah knew him to be brave and zealous in his service.

“ And you, dog that you are !” said the King, as the Beg appeared before him, “ who would

call yourself mehmander what were you doing ! when those under your charge were fleeing from the city, and leaving you behind them to look like a fool and an ass as you are ? Give him the stick ! Stick you want, and stick you shall have !”

The Beg began to roar, to remonstrate, and to entreat ; all would not do—his feet soon looked upwards, and his nicely-attired person was not long in performing certain convolutions on the dusted pavement, as he writhed under the sharp blows which fell like hail upon him. His torture was not of long duration, but it had the effect of essentially stopping that constant flow of empty boastings with which he was afflicted, and making him a wiser mehmander.

When the King retired from the dewan kha-neh, he returned to his private apartments, dismissing every body from his presence excepting the Humpback. During the whole of the public audience, his thoughts were entirely absorbed in the history of the bazubend, which, as if it were a piece of live coal within the folds of his garment, appeared burning for revenge.

Now that he was free from other cares, he reverted to this with a degree of savage eagerness which spoke how entirely it had taken possession of his mind.

“ You found it near the pillow, did you ?” said the Shah.

“ As I am your sacrifice, I did,” said the Humpback.

“ Did you remark any thing else ?” enquired the King.

“ Nothing,” said the Humpback ; “ but—”

“ But—what ?” roared the agitated monarch, in the utmost impatience.

“ Your slave does not venture to say what he has heard,” said the crafty barber, with assumed backwardness.

“ Speak, wretch !” said the King, his eyes almost starting from their sockets ; “ speak, ere I cut your tongue out.”

“ As I am your sacrifice,” said the other, “ I was informed that a man was seen descending from the turret on that same night.”

Upon hearing this, the Shah, without giving himself time to make more inquiries, gasped

for breath. His senses appeared to be totally and entirely bewildered; he was as weak as a child, and his ferocity seemed for a moment to have forsaken him. All he could utter was—
“ Send for the Khajeh Bashi.”

At the sight of this officer, who was ever in close attendance, and who immediately made his appearance, shaking from fear, all his violence returned, and with a screech more like the tones of an animal than that of a human voice, he said—“ Pander ! there has been a man in the harem !”

The wretched creature to whom this was addressed so shook from head to foot, that his tongue refused to do its office, and he in vain tried to say the usual “ *Corban et shuvum* !” * His jaw vibrated, and that was all.

“ Speak !—where have been your eyes ?—A man was seen descending from the turret !” said the Shah, the words scarcely finding utterance from his choking throat.

“ A man !—*Astafferallah* !—Heaven forbid !” said the poor wretch. “ We know nothing of

* *Corban et shuvum*—I am your sacrifice.

him. By the head of the Shah ! by the salt of the King ! your slave falls from the skies. What news is this ?”

By this time the deputy of the Khajeh Bashi had also been brought in ; and he, being a man of nerve, said with all possible humility, that if any thing of the sort had taken place, it must have been when there was so much difficulty in making way to the turret chamber through the Banou's apartment, on the Shah's last visit to the lady Amima.

These words excited all the Shah's curiosity ; and when the chief guardian, upon recollection, confessed that he had seen a collection of shawls tied together, hanging from the window frame in the turret, and had suspected that all was not right, conviction flashed upon the Shah's mind that the sacred precincts of his harem had been betrayed, and that his niece was guilty.

He required no further investigation — his mind was convinced : — he dismissed every one from his presence, and seemed to court solitude as a relief ;—but, far from being a relief, it was increase of pain. The fire which raged in

his breast, only burnt the more fiercely from the constant excitement of his own thoughts;—a thousand resolves passed in quick succession through his mind; they all terminated in violence, but no violence which he could devise appeared to him sufficiently seasoned with revenge. It must be said that the sort of passion which he entertained for his niece was in no wise that of a lover for a mistress; it was a devoted tenderness, a sense of gratitude towards her for allowing him to feel that at least there was one creature in the world who cared for him. This hope, he now learnt, was a mere illusion of his brain, a false, hollow sentiment; and the consequent reaction, added to that of offended pride at the violated sacredness of his dignity, and of every other feeling which can most wound a Persian's honour, worked him up almost to phrensy. “She dies! — she dies!” he was constantly repeating to himself, as he rested his head upon his hands, occasionally rising from his seat and walking to and fro. He devised many schemes for putting his intention into execution, but none accorded with his feelings. He thought

of the turret as a fitting place to hurl her from ; but he dreaded lest her cries might alarm the harem, who would rise in her favour. At one moment his fury roused him to do the deed himself ; at another he would have seen it perpetrated before his eyes, in order that he might enjoy her sufferings ; but when the moment for decision came, he found that in fact he was afraid of confronting her, so much did he feel how completely he was in her power when they were face to face.

At length he made up his mind as to the best mode of effecting his purpose ; and this was, to order her destruction without again seeing her. Sadek was a man in whose fidelity he knew he could trust, for he had never deceived him ; his dogged resolution and courage were proof against every thing ; and to him he determined to entrust the accomplishment of this dark deed. Accordingly he summoned him, and, when he had ascertained that they were entirely alone and no ears within hearing, he caused him to approach almost within whispering distance, and then in a low and sup-

pressed tone said, with all that earnestness of manner for which he was famous—

“Sadek,” I have ever been satisfied with thy services. Thy King now requires a proof of thy devotion, which he can entrust to none other than thee.” The words which he was about to utter appeared to choke him. Calling up a long drawn sigh, and using great violence upon himself, he said—“Amima dies ! I have said it. Take her hence this night—never let me see her more. Go—show her this—(giving him the armlet)—it will explain all.—Go——”

He would have said more, but respiration almost failed him. Sadek, in wild consternation, would have answered and remonstrated at this cruel order ; but the King made him signs, such as belong to a maniac, to be gone : and knowing what the reaction might be if he pressed the matter too hard, he kissed the ground and left the presence.

CHAPTER XIII.

The lady pressed her coal-black steed,
The slave he rode before ;
Onward they sped o'er deserts wild,
Her home she saw no more.

EASTERN BALLAD.

AMIMA had been made acquainted with the events that had taken place as they occurred. Zohrab's flight, the one which had most interested her, although at first received with a pang, on the whole gave her a true and sincere pleasure. That one moment which had assured her of his love, was at present a sufficient reward for every evil ; and as she felt aware that, in their present circumstances, by no combination in their favour could they have been united, so, the next thing to wish for, was

his personal safety — and that, she now felt, was secured. She and her attendant Mariam had been discussing these events till late in the evening, and the usual profound stillness which reigned over the royal harem had long remained unbroken, when at the further end of the court they heard the voices of men, accompanied by footsteps, as if they were proceeding towards them.

Conscious that she might be implicated in the Shah's wrath, however innocent, should Zohrab's visit to her apartments ever come to light, she could not fail to entertain great apprehension and fear, every time that any unusual noise was heard, or any strange person was admitted within the walls of her domain. As the footsteps approached, their fears were more awakened; and they became intense as soon as the curtain of her apartment was thrown on one side, and the Khajeh Bashi, with his deputy, stood before them. In the Khajeh Bashi's looks, too, there was a sinister and mysterious expression, so different from his usual most cringing, most abject manner, that Amima felt

there were good reasons for her fear. Mariam's colour forsook her, and she stood like one on the point of execution.

"What has happened?" said Amima, putting on a resolute look. "Why do you disturb us thus late?"

"The Shah requires your attendance," said the eunuch.

"Why so late?" said the maiden. "This is unheard of. We are going to rest."

"The orders of the King are absolute: *Bismillah*!—in the name of Allah!" said the inexorable man, with a dogged impertinence, quite foreign to his usual manner.

"But how? where? Here, Mariam," said she, "give me my veil and *chakchurs*," trembling with agitation.

"There is no necessity for a veil. Come quickly," said the Khajeh Bashi.

"What insolence is this?" said the Princess, her blood excited by this want of respect. "I go before the Shah, and willingly; but of this be certain, the first word I utter will be complaint of thee. Will the Shah consent to

see his niece exposed to the gaze of man without her veil?"

Upon hearing these words the hideous creature indulged in a malignant exulting chuckle, as if he would have said, "Do thy worst, I laugh at thy threats."

This caught the attention of Mariam, who was struck at once with the true meaning of his exultation. Every feeling of love and devotion for her mistress rushed into her heart, and seeing the danger which awaited her, and feeling that she was the cause of it, she bounded forward, and in accents of madness, as she threw her arms round her person, swore that no one should take her away, and that nothing should separate them. Upon this the strong arm of the deputy Khajeh was called into action by order of his chief; but notwithstanding his interference, he would scarcely have mastered her, had not Amima herself commanded her to desist from further resistance. "I will go, Mariam," said she. "The Shah is just, though he may be violent. He shall learn all,

and then, be assured, he will forgive that which he at present knows but imperfectly."

Upon which the heroic maiden, merely throwing a shawl over her head, left her peaceable and cherished apartments, and with a determined step followed the Khajeh Bashi. Mariam also would have followed, but she was forcibly detained by the deputy, leaving the now unprotected and destitute Amima to listen to her sobs and wailings as she followed her conductor along the dark still courts of the harem. It was a trying moment to her fortitude; never before had she been permitted to stir without the attendance of more than regal state. What a contrast to her present forlorn situation! Her spirits kept up as she proceeded through the two or three courts which it was necessary to cross in order to reach the Shah's apartment; but when she found herself led on in a different direction, and taking her steps towards one of the exits of the harem, her heart sank within her, and the most dismal forebodings came across her mind. In addition to the

principal entrance, which is a lofty porch, guarded by a considerable body of black slaves, there is a secret portal, so small that it requires the person passing it to stoop; and it was hither the Khajeh Bashi conducted our heroine. It is situated immediately on the brink of the ditch which encompasses the Ark, and a small by-path leads to the drawbridge, which enters upon the great square of the city. It was scarcely possible to uncloset the portal, for it was but seldom used, and only upon secret and mysterious occasions, such as the present. After much exertion, however, the Khajeh Bashi forced it open; and there in the gloom of the night Amima could just discern a man holding two horses. The old eunuch, who held a small lantern in his hand, raising it, exhibited to the eyes of the trembling maiden her future conductor, completely muffled up from head to foot as a disguise to his person, who immediately advanced one of the horses towards her. Here her heart had nearly failed, and she enquired from the Khajeh Bashi what this all meant, and why he did not take her to the Shah?

“Mount this horse,” was all the answer she received.

“I go not,” said Amima, roused into anger, “until I see the King.”

“Speak not, but mount,” said the hard-hearted wretch.

The forlorn maiden now discovered the full extent of her danger; and the horrors of death, such as she knew had before been frequently inflicted upon unfortunate women, burst upon her senses, and harrowed up all her fears. The more she persisted in not stirring till she had seen her uncle, the less did the wretch in whose hands she was, seem to respect her:—at length she said—“Tell me, in pity, why am I brought here? What is my crime, that I am treated thus like a common criminal?”

Upon this the demon in human shape who stood near her, holding up the light with one hand, with the other exhibited to her eyes, in a manner not to be mistaken, the cherished though mischievous armlet. At the sight of this, further explanation was unnecessary—the whole extent of her misfortune was placed in the

strongest colours before her, and the executioner's arm was scarcely required, so totally had life apparently forsaken her frame. This agitation did not, however, to all appearance, excite any pity in her conductors. An interval was allowed her to recover, when the muffled-up figure approached to assist her to mount, and from him she thought she heard the words "Fear not," spoken in a scarcely audible whisper, which in some measure gave her courage. With difficulty she was seated, and then, without more ado, the new conductor mounted the second horse, and guiding her's by a leading-string, they slowly took their way along the narrow path on the limits of the ditch, and straightway crossed the drawbridge. The horses appeared to be of the finest quality: they threaded the mazes of the city in a quick amble; and when once they had passed the gates, which were opened and shut again in a most mysterious manner without a word being spoken, they struck into a rapid pace, which very soon became a gallop. Without speaking, the mysterious conductor dashed onward with increasing velocity, scarcely

looking back, and apparently unconscious whether what was placed upon the horse which followed him was a living creature or inanimate lumber. Onward they went—the plain of Tehran was rapidly crossed; the intricacies of the intervening mountains were as quickly passed—nothing stopped their career; the horses only seemed to acquire fresh vigour from the intensity of their speed, and the ground disappeared from under their hoofs with an ease and facility that was almost superhuman. So strange, so appalling, but at the same time so invigorating was the situation in which Amima was placed, that with her senses bewildered, and her body in violent action, she could in no manner collect her thoughts. Her mysterious conductor rode onward some three yards before her, and all she could discern in the darkness was a mass bounding before her, which she seemed ever on the point of overtaking, but which was always there, neither farther nor nearer. At length the delicacy of her frame began to feel this great and continuous motion, and she ventured to utter a low

shriek of remonstrance. Her conductor heeded it not ; — head, shoulders, legs, and horse went bounding on, up and down, up and down, as if it had been a machine set to perform a certain piece of work, totally divested of hearing or sensation. Again she shrieked, louder, and still louder. She might as well have complained to the wind ; not the slightest notice was taken of her. By this time they had crossed much of the high road to Ispahan ; and as they came to the confines of the Great Salt Desert, slanting to the east, they struck into a track of the most naked region of wilderness, apparently without the vestige of a path to direct them, and nothing but the first dawn of day to give light to their horses' footsteps. Here their speed appeared to increase. It seemed as if a new world, one which the imagination might create to itself as a type of the regions of future punishment, was spread before them — a soil arid, thirsty, and sulphureous, with no vegetation, save here and there long withered rushes creaking to and fro before the blast, broken up into fantastic-shaped masses, which crumbled into forms of

hideous angular faces, or gigantic monsters. This was the region, over which no Persian ever travelled without putting up prayers for a safe journey,—it was famous throughout the country as the resort of *ghouls* and wood demons; and having accomplished it, he blessed his Prophet for a safe deliverance from danger.

A low moaning wind was wont to blow over the waste, which sometimes increased into furious blasts, and at others died away into melancholy murmurs. Rising at break of day, it gained strength as the sun rose, and continued to blow with more or less violence during the twenty-four hours. As the two horses and their riders bounded over the cheerless wilderness, they might have been taken for the genii of the place — their appearance a dark outline, their speed unchecked, and their direction apparently undefined — seemingly bent on business of mysterious import, maintaining an awful silence, broken only ever and anon by wild screeches from the suffering maiden, which were borne unheeded away upon the passing blast.

The wretched Amima was now almost exhausted; her guide, however, seemed to keep one steady, undeviating line towards a mound of curious and abrupt form, which rose conspicuous, though but little, above the surface of the surrounding wilderness. The same deserted and uninhabited character reigned throughout the region over which they passed, as far as the eye could reach, and they now appeared farther than ever from the abode of mortals, when on a sudden the mysterious guide stopped. The horses, all panting, but still not distressed, stood with their heads towards each other. The wretched Amima, more dead than alive, almost dropped off her horse, as her disguised companion helped her to dismount. His manner was respectful, but, as he neither spoke nor gave her the least sign of recognition, she could not discover who or what he was. She would have thrown herself upon his mercy, but when about to address him, to her utter horror and dismay she saw him again mount his horse, and, leading off the other, dart from before her with the same reckless and unrelenting

speed. He had merely disengaged a bundle which had been hanging at his saddle-bow, and thrown it towards her; but she thought that, as he darted off, she heard him repeat the words "Fear not!" which he had used on their first meeting. Her heart drooped in despair when she listened to the sound of the horse's hoofs as they gradually died away upon her ear; all the horrors of her situation came pouring upon her imagination, like hideous phantoms passing in grim array before her, until she saw death in all its various and most appalling shapes. Her beautiful form covered with a shawl, her head supported by her hand, rested against a projection of the arid soil, and seemed like a creation foreign to the horrors by which she was surrounded. She first dwelt upon the pangs of famine; then she thought of beasts of prey, of the famished wolf, or the wild hyæna, which she knew were common to this track; again, she dreaded to become a prize to the famished vultures of the desert, who so mysteriously gather together apparently by one common consent. Thus

abandoned, thus hopelessly left to die, she dropped on her knees; and there, in the midst of this howling wilderness, was to be seen her angel form, imploring, in the most ardent and heart-rending accents, the assistance and mercy of that Almighty Being whom she knew and felt to be the refuge of all his creatures. Every act and thought of her past existence was brought before her, as if she were actually called upon to give an account of her conduct in this world; and, with all the real humility of her nature, she deplored her unworthiness, and prayed for forgiveness. This exercise soothed and refreshed her, but still fear predominated; every sound of the passing blast, every rustle of the withered reed, made her blood creep, and conjured up a thousand real or imaginary dangers.

In the mean while the day had dawned, the east was slightly streaked with red, and the hideous landscape was now sufficiently lighted up to exhibit all its deformity. Objects became more distinct in the west upon which

the light gleamed, but, as seen opposed to the rising sun, were not immediately to be recognized. The maiden's eyes were turned in that direction. On a sudden she perceived something move upon the verge of the horizon : it was evidently a living object ; it moved onwards and towards herself. Immediately all her fears were roused ; she thought she discerned the wild animal so much dreaded. Her mind was not insensible to the fear of supernatural beings,—the midnight spectre,—the ghoul, that searcher for corpses and lover of human flesh ;—every horror which she had ever heard in her infancy, repeated to her in maturer years, and now rendered certain by the power of her imagination, came before her mind ; and as the being approached, her eyes became fixed, she would have screamed but could not. She at length gave utterance to one long, agonized cry, and then, all animation leaving her exhausted frame, fell into a state of total insensibility.

This so much dreaded being was nothing

more or less than a creature of flesh and blood, in the shape of a youth of about fourteen years of age. He was a fine, well-made, hardy-looking boy; wild in his appearance, as a child of one of the rural gods might be drawn; very rudely clothed, his hair hanging wild and unshorn about his shoulders, and bearing every appearance of living almost in a state of nature. Upon hearing the cry uttered by the affrighted maiden, he looked about him in amazement, such sounds being totally foreign to his ear, and at length discovered her. He approached with a slow and cautious step, as if she had been an animal of a new species; and when he had fully distinguished her whole form, his eyes became riveted upon her beautiful face with such intensity, that he appeared like one transfixed. Thinking her asleep, he was cautious in his approaches, but, when he remarked the paleness of her cheek and her death-like appearance, he feared that she might be dead. His young heart had never before known this state of perplexity; an object at once so new

and so attractive had never before met his eyes; and he remained, with outstretched neck, staring eyes, and open mouth, uncertain what to do — whether to leave her there and seek for assistance, or to help her himself. The latter resolve at length prevailed : summoning all his resolution, he went close to her, and first touched her face with the tip of his finger,—it felt as cold as stone : this gave him courage, for she stirred not, and he then uplifted her hand ; he thought he saw her move, and in order to ascertain this, began to rub it with all his might. This indeed roused her, and he was overjoyed. He continued his efforts, until, to his delight, she opened her eyes; but when she caught the first glimpse of the youth, she gave so sudden a scream, that he bounded back in alarm. At the sight of one so strange and so wild, her strength returned almost suddenly, and she immediately arose, when, clasping her shawl about her face so as to screen it, she retreated some paces. He, on the contrary, advanced ; but with a manner so respectful that she soon bade adieu

to alarm on his account, and ventured to speak to him. "Where am I?" said she; "as you are a Mussulman and love Allah, speak!"

The wild creature, hearing sounds so sweet from a mouth so bewitching, almost danced for joy; and lent his ear to catch their meaning.

"Who are you?" said she, trying him upon another subject; "whence come you?"

These words he immediately understood, and answered, "I am Ali Murad. Do you know me?"

"But what are you?" said she.

"I am my father's son," said the simple creature.

"Where do you live?" enquired the maiden.

"Even here," answered he: "come, come!"

"Who is your father?" still enquired she.

"He is Hussein the white beard," he answered. "Do you know him?"

"What is his business?" said Amima with great eagerness.

The boy looked sad, and hesitated, but presently answered with a sigh, "*Hitch*, — no-

thing ;” and putting up his hands to his eyes, which he had shut, added sorrowfully, “ He is blind !”

Amima cast her eyes about, searching for the habitation which the boy seemed to point out as near at hand, but in vain. At the same time she discovered the bundle, which she eagerly opened, in the hope of ascertaining by its contents what might be her fate ; but all she found was a complete suit of woman’s dress, adapted to the wants of a well-clad peasant, and a purse of money. In vain she turned over in her mind what this could mean ; the only conclusion at which she arrived was, that her destruction was not intended. So far there was consolation in the discovery ; but when she turned round, and saw the hopeless state of abandonment into which she was thrown, and the companion allotted to her, her heart sank within her. She followed Ali Murad, as he led the way ; and the first sign of habitation which she saw was a well, to the neighbourhood of which she probably owed her preservation,

for he evidently had come hither to draw water. Upon passing the mound before alluded to, towards which the mysterious guide had bent his steps, they came immediately upon a low clay-built hovel, scarcely to be distinguished by its colour from the soil upon which it stood. It was rudely covered over with brambles, upon which a coating of clay had been placed. In front it presented a door and two paper-covered windows, and to all outward appearance was the abode of the most wretched of Persian rayats. Hither, however, the boy conducted the forlorn Amima, looking into her eyes to discover her surprise and admiration at the sight of what he supposed must be the most magnificent of mansions.

Preceding her by some steps, he rushed into the hovel, and soon after came forward, conducting a blind man by the hand. Although dressed in the rudest manner, with clothes of the most common materials, his whole appearance announced great dignity. Though his eyesight was gone, the expression of his countenance

was noble and commanding. His beard, blanched either by age or misfortune, swept his girdle ; and upon seeing him, an internal conviction was produced that he was one who had known better days.

As he advanced towards Amima, led on by Ali Murad, she heard him exclaim, “ A woman, did you say, Ali Murad ? How, in the name of Allah ! came she hither ? ”

“ Here she is,” said the boy ; “ speak to her.”

Amima, upon perceiving the blind man, felt for him all the respect which his appearance would command : and dwelling upon his fine features, expressive of kindness and benignity, with the rapture of one who, having been exposed to great danger, had at length found safety, she approached him with confidence.

“ Is it true,” said the old man, “ that thou art a woman, sick, and in distress ? Who and what art thou ? How camest thou here ? The desert is no place for such as thou.”

Amima was distressed at these questions ; for

she knew not what conduct to adopt, in a situation to her so new and so embarrassing. She became reluctant to answer them, and, unwilling to discover who she was, determined to say nothing on that head for the present. She, however, answered generally, that having unwittingly given rise to some person's enmity, she had by the most unaccountable violence been dragged from her home, had been thus abandoned in the desert, and probably left to starve and die. "But see," said she, "the providence of God! You are come to my assistance, and in you I claim a protector."

"Whatever we possess is yours," said the stranger. "We are creatures of the wilderness. Excepting shelter for your head, and food to keep you alive, we have little else to offer; but to that you are welcome. Come, take your rest."

As they advanced towards the house, Hussein Aga, in a strong voice, cried out to one within, who appeared to be a third inmate, to

come forth; when an old crone, almost bent double with age, came hobbling out. She received his orders to take care of his new guest, and very soon prepared so to do, although her surprise at seeing Amima was such, that she could scarcely refrain from muttering "*Ajaib!*" and "*Allah, Allah il Allah!*" for the rest of the day — so wonderful did it appear that any thing mortal could have found its way into the depths of the wilderness.

The cottage was by no means so small as on its first appearance it appeared to be. It contained a small inner room, which the old woman inhabited, and which she now made over to Amima. Though rude in its materials as any peasant's hovel, it was clean; the walls were whitewashed, and it had the proper complement of furniture common to every Persian room, namely, a carpet and three nummuds. Here her hospitable friends invited her to take the rest which she so much wanted; and although the bed which they spread for her use was sufficiently rude, so great was the

fatigue which she had undergone, that it answered as good purpose as the luxurious couches which she had so recently left; and very soon she had forgotten her miseries in that temporary cure of all evils — a sound sleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

Two cocks fought one day. The vanquished fled, and hid in a secret place.

LOCMAN.

AMIMA, having had time to collect her thoughts, was now fully persuaded that the Shah had intended her death, but that, through the interference of some kind person, her life had been spared, and she had intentionally been placed where she now was. However dismal the prospects of her future fate might be, if she were indeed destined to pass her existence in this place of exile, still she was safe; the vicissitudes of life were such, particularly in so unsettled a community as her own, that the same destiny which had thrown her into the desert might again take her from it; and gild-

ing the horizon of her future prospects with a bright ray of hope, her mind could look forward to the time when, forgetting her present miseries, she might be united for ever to the man of her choice. Her most urgent desire now was, to learn of whom she was the guest. It was evident that her silver-bearded host was a personage of consequence, about whom there was much mystery, and whose seclusion was, like her own, caused by fear of detection. To this his appearance, his manner, and language bore testimony; and as the person who had thus thrown them together, must have done it intentionally, it was evident that his object could not be that of keeping them unacquainted with each other's situation. She determined therefore upon the first opportunity to make known who she was to the old man, upon a promise that he would confer a similar favour upon herself.

The opportunity was not long wanting. As soon as she had been refreshed by rest, having returned thanks to Allah for her deliverance from danger, she left her chamber and sought her host.

He was seated in a corner of his own miserable room, counting his beads and repeating his

Astaferallahs,* with an expression of content and resignation imprinted upon his features, which seemed to say how much habit had reconciled him to his present forlorn state.

As soon as he heard her approach, her light step being a sound totally new to him, he immediately recognized her, and said, “Bismillah ! come and sit near me, O daughter ! Let not a broken and sightless man like me frighten thee. Whoever thou art, may God’s blessing be upon thee !”

“Pray for me,” said Amima, affected upon hearing these kind words — “Pray for me, father ! — I seek your protection. — May your shadow never be less !”

“You have been in my mind,” said the old man, “ever since you have been here. Your coming is wonderful. By what stroke of destiny you have found this hole in the wilderness, has not yet reached my understanding. Ali Murad tells me that every thing in you bespeaks a being of a superior order. He talks of your clothes as things to which his imagination has not yet reached, and of your beauty as of something surpassing belief. Speak, O daughter !

* *Astaferallah*—God forgive me!

say—why are you come here? and, for the love of Allah! who are you?”

The more the maiden conversed with the stranger, the more her heart inclined towards him. He had created a feeling in her breast which had secured all her confidence, and which urged her to keep nothing secret from him.

“Upon my eyes be it!” said Amima; “I have nothing to conceal. But you must, in return, promise to relate to me your history; for, believe me, you have as much interested me as I can have interested you.”

“I place myself in your hands,” said he, with a slight hesitation in his manner. “You shall judge how far I can trust any one to hear my tale, when I tell you beforehand that I am not supposed to exist among the sons of men. I am looked upon as dead; and, in truth, I endeavour to think myself so.”

“You can have no confidence in a stranger like me, I grant,” she said; “but perhaps, when you have heard my story, you will find that I am not totally unworthy of it.”

“In the name of the Prophet! speak on,” said the stranger; “I am impatient.”

“It has often been the occupation of my soli-

tary moments," said Amima, "to endeavour to call up some recollection of my father and mother; but in vain. I have in various ways heard much concerning them, but never has any distinct image of their persons been established in my mind. I was therefore quite an infant when I lost their protection. They have always been described to me as unfortunate persons, whose fates were mixed up with the many revolutions and scenes of horror which were common to Persia before the present King succeeded in establishing a complete sway over the whole country. My father, in particular, was one to whom the vicissitudes of life were common. He was a brave soldier, sometimes a fortunate one, —possessing at one time great power and great riches, at another as much the contrary, reduced to a few followers from commanding armies, and living upon the wild fruits of the mountains, when before he had enjoyed the refinements of luxury."

"Allah! Allah!" exclaimed the old man, with the greatest interest in his manner, "you are relating my own history."

"As far as I can recollect of myself, I know that I had and have a brother, who is the only

being" (here she faltered and blushed) "whom I really loved as a child. Of those under whose care we were placed I have no distinct idea, saving one old nurse who brought us up as a mother ; but, as I grew up, I was surrounded by great splendour, I was flattered, I was called *banou* and princess. My clothes were those of royalty, my attendants were those of a queen, and I have always called the Shah my uncle."

"*Ahi !*" said the stranger, "what words are you speaking ? In the name of Allah ! then who was your father ?"

"I was told he was the Shah's brother," said the maiden, alarmed at the great interest which she had excited.

"And what is your name ?" said he.

"I am called *Amima*," she replied.

"Can it be ?" exclaimed the old man, in a transport of joy and astonishment. "O Allah ! can it be ? Art thou indeed *Amima*, daughter of *Hussein Kûli* ? If so, thou art mine !—my *Amima* !—my daughter ! Where art thou ?" extending his arms as he spoke ; "come to me, my soul !"

It would be impossible fully to describe the

sensations which arose in the breast of both father and daughter. Let it suffice, that they identified each other. The miseries of the exile to which they were condemned seemed at once to have vanished. New feelings and new interests at once sprang up, and the wilderness by which they were surrounded no longer retained that horrid character which had before belonged to it. Amima, who willingly yielded to the joy of possessing a father, after having testified to him by every means in her power her determination never to leave him, but to devote herself to his comfort, expressed her anxiety to learn by what circumstances he had been thrown in the situation where she had now found him.

“The story is long, my child,” said the broken Khan, “and it will require some time to collect my thoughts, and revive my recollections of the past. Many years of utter solitude have almost made your father forget that he ever belonged to the community of man. It is difficult for the mind which has acquired the habit of thinking solely of an hereafter, to turn again to the things of this world. But tell me first of your brother. You men-

tioned him; and having regained you, and hearing of him, I find myself as it were restored to life. Tell me, where is Fatted Ali? Does he live, or has the tyrant deprived me also of him?"

"He lives, and is well," said Amima. She then related that part of his history with which she was acquainted; describing their last interview, before he set off to take possession of the government of Fars, and cheering her father's heart by a most favourable account of his person, his accomplishments, and his conduct.

"I am grateful to thee at least for that, O my brother!" said he, as he apostrophized the Shah; and giving way to an audible reverie, "Thou hast preserved thy nephew and thy niece, because thou hast been rid of thy brother." Then, seemingly absorbed in calling up recollections of the past, he said to his daughter, "It is so long since I have retired from the world, that with difficulty can I recall the history of my past life; but it is of consequence that you should know it. I will give you the summary of it now, and you shall hear more of it in its different details, as they come to my memory."

The maiden shuddered to think how much more than leisure they would be likely to possess for that purpose ; but, grasping her father's hand, she entreated him to gratify her curiosity, and placed herself in an attitude of great attention. He thus began :—

“ My father was a celebrated chieftain of the Kajar tribe, whose principal residence was in Mazanderan. His name was Mahomed Hussein Khan. He had two sons, namely, the present Shah and myself. When we were quite infants, Adil Shah, successor to the famous Nadir, took up his residence in Mazanderan, which obliged my father to leave his home in Asterabad, and seek refuge among the Turcomans. There my brother and I passed our first infancy, our father at the same time exerting himself to raise up enemies against Adil Shah, who had taken possession of the province over which he had formerly held full sway. Adil Shah, desirous of destroying so dangerous an enemy, managed by bribes to obtain possession of both my brother and myself, in order to secure hostages for my father's good behaviour. We remained in his hands, for some time unmolested, but, my father exhibiting some indica-

tions of disobedience, the cruel tyrant emasculated my brother, leaving me for a similar fate at the next appearance of rebellion which might be shown by our parent. Before, however, he could put his intention into execution, Adil Shah died, and we immediately returned to our father, who, finding himself free, raised the standard of revolt against Kerîm Khan, then the Vekil, as he called himself, of Persia, and in possession of Fars; and leaving his woody fastnesses of Mazanderan, entered into the open country of Irâk, and marched upon Ispahan.

“ My brother and I were then quite stripplings — he about eighteen, and I one year younger. The cruel manner in which my brother had been treated, had at a very early period impaired the original frame of his character: from being of an open and joyous disposition, he became gloomy and suspicious; and although we were entirely brought up together, and he loved me better than any other person in the world, if such a sentiment as love could ever find a place in his breast, yet even of me he was ever jealous, secretly hating that

destiny which had made the hand of cruelty fall upon himself rather than upon me.

“ He early began to perceive how inferior in person he was to those with whom we associated, and therefore turned all his endeavours to the improvement of his acute and intelligent mind, by which he gained an extraordinary ascendancy over every one with whom he conversed or transacted business. He also ceded to none in manly exercises; for though his person, to outward appearance, was wan and emaciated, he possessed great muscular powers, and could endure as much fatigue as the hardiest marauder. Although the youngest, I was more courted than my brother, owing perhaps to the superiority of my person; and this circumstance, most probably, laid the foundation of that inveterate hatred in his breast which in after-life broke out so terribly against me, and brought on my present misfortunes.

“ My father, at the head of his followers, and supported by his son, met Kerîm Khan's troops near Ispahan. This was the first real battle in which my brother and myself had been engaged; and never shall I forget the effect

which it produced upon me. He, in full possession of his presence of mind, knew precisely what orders to give, and whither to direct the troops: I was all fire and impetuosity, and only felt myself right as long as I remained under the control of my brother. The battle was a desperate rush on both sides, in which the numbers of Kerîm Khan's troops overpowered ours, though in bravery we evidently bore off the palm. Unluckily, in the very heat of the fight, when we thought that victory was about to crown our exertions, my father fell dead from a musket-ball which pierced his heart, and my brother, endeavouring to keep possession of his body, was surrounded and taken prisoner. A total rout of our troops immediately ensued, in which I was fortunate enough to make my escape, having the mortification to see my brother borne away hopelessly from me.

“ My father's followers having lost their chief, and seeing in me nothing but an inexperienced youth, soon left me and dispersed — some to their homes, others, forming themselves into small predatory bands, continued to infest the country. I was left almost alone, only ten men of our own family and tribe remaining

faithful to me. So little was I yet broken into the reverses of life, that, not having learnt to put my trust in Allah, I placed my head upon my knees, and fairly cried for hours together. At length an old whitebeard of my father's, one of his *yuz bashi*, who had seen me born, and who had faithfully adhered to him in all his vicissitudes, came to me and said, 'God is great!—God is merciful!—Who can withstand destiny? I, whose beard is grey, have seen the tops and bottoms of things, and know that there are good days as well as bad days. Why, therefore, should you repine? Mashallah! you are young; praise be to Allah! you are a fine youth; you can ride well; and, although I say it, you are a lord of the sword: why, therefore, lose hope? Harken to the words of an old servant. Wind up your spirits, set your brain in good order, and collect your energies. Let us go, and Allah go with us! Inshallah! our destinies will take a good turn. We will burn the father of the first enemy we meet, and drink his blood:—what do you want more?"

"This language cheered me, and I arose from my grief, with the intention of returning to our house at Asterabad, and resuming the friendship

which my father had formed among the Turcomans. I succeeded in making my way home, living upon the country as I and my companions travelled onwards. Afterwards, for several successive years I joined myself occasionally to *chappows* made by the Turcomans, and by little and little acquired the character of a *Sahib Shemshir* — a man of the sword, together with the confidence of a large band of adventurers. I never heard from my brother except by uncertain reports, but I knew that he was still detained by Kerîm Khan ; and once I was assured by a Mollah who came to Asterabad, that he was considerably esteemed at that chieftain's court, and by his wisdom and ability had succeeded in securing his confidence and goodwill.

“ During these days of my vagabond life I married your mother. My Amima was the most lovely maiden among the Turcomans, fair as a houri, excellent as an angel, and rumoured as the greatest beauty of the plains of Kipchak. Her father was the most powerful white-beard of the Turcoman obahs ; he was rich in sheep and mares, and his opinion was courted far and wide. As soon as I became his son-in-law, I

found myself at once raised to power ; for, what with my family in Asterabad, and my connexion with the Turcomans, so many were those who courted me and flocked to my gate, that I willingly listened to the flattering assurances which they constantly poured into my ears, that I alone was worthy of being the sovereign of Persia. Who is there among God's creatures, my Amima ! who once in his life at least does not eat dirt ? This was my destiny, and my turn was come for eating it. My flatterers mixed up a bowl of vanity, which I drank off, and as its intoxicating contents passed over the palate of exultation, they swelled my heart with arrogance, and my bowels with ambition. In short, I made the *ada ul sultanet*,—I became a pretender to the throne. I found myself surrounded with a host of needy though hardy soldiers, accustomed to the warfare of marauders, skilled in attack and cunning in retreat ; and as I promised largely, the body which at first collected was soon increased to a very imposing force ; more horses neighing in the tethers, and more pots boiling on my hearth, than had been known since the days of Nadir the Conqueror.

“ After having subjected much of Mazanderan, I crossed the mountains, and laid Khorasan under contribution. I took possession of Meshed, and there I first assumed the airs of a king. I mounted a jika, I wore bazubends, I ascended a musnud, and every day I had a selam, men bowing before me, and telling me that I was God’s shadow upon earth. Young as I was, full of self-importance, elated by the success which attended me, I projected an extension of my dominions, and determined to march upon Ispahan.

“ In the mean while, the reports of my success had spread far and wide throughout Persia, and called the attention of the Vekil to my undertakings. I soon heard that I was about to be vigorously opposed, and that an army from Shiraz was marching upon me. I and my followers were full of security in our success. We despised the southern Persians, womanlike-men as we called them; and in opposition to their effeminacy, claimed for ourselves the title of *kizzilbashes*,—descendants of Nadir,—the lion-eaters of the North.

“ At length, after much expectation, one morning, not far from Mûrchebord, the site

of a famous battle, we saw a large body of cavalry, which we recognized to be men of Fars, Arabs, and Balouchistanis. A halt was made on both sides ; both parties looked at each other like wrestlers watching where to plant the first blow, or liké lions lashing themselves up to combat. After some delay, all at once I perceived a single horseman dash forward from the condensed mass, and, furiously urging his horse towards us, advance with increasing speed. As he approached, it appeared as if his person was not new to me. I ordered one of my gholams to meet him. He did not heed him, but passed on contemptuously. As he still came nearer, I exclaimed, ‘ Who is that ? In the name of Allah ! can it be ? ’ Before I could utter another word, I found myself in the arms of my brother.

“ A horse-covering was soon spread for us on the ground, and there, in the face of our united forces, we related our respective histories. My brother informed me that he had managed to secure the entire confidence of Kerîm Khan, and that for a long while he had ruled him almost entirely ; that the enterprise in which he was now engaged had long been a

concerted plan ; that the Khan had, of his own accord, proposed that my brother should head the troops which he now sent against me : in short, he informed me, that hearing of my success, he was now come to join me, and, with the accession of force which he brought (for he had succeeded in bringing the troops over to himself,) he did not despair of our making head against the power of Kerîm Khan, and securing to ourselves the kingdom.

“ As you may suppose, I was delighted with this most unlooked-for piece of good fortune, and willingly agreed to every scheme which my brother suggested. In my joy at seeing him, and in the enthusiasm of the moment, I even offered to resign to him, as my elder brother, the crown which I had placed upon my own head. He said nothing at the moment, either in the affirmative or the negative, but orders were immediately given for taking possession of Ispahan, which we entered together in all the power and state of royalty.

“ My brother insisted upon my sending for my wife and family, in order that he might see them, and enjoy the pleasure of knowing those so near and dear to him, long as he had been de-

prived of the consolation of relationship. They came. You then, my Amima, were a blooming child, and your brother Fattéh Ali a noble boy, beautiful as a rose. Your uncle then first gave him the endearing name of Baba Khan, which I suppose he keeps to this day—and treated you both with all the kindness which his wayward nature would permit. For some time I continued to appear the ostensible monarch, although in the eyes of the people we shared the honours of that station.

“ But now comes the afflicting portion of my story. It is evident that two suns cannot shine in one hemisphere, as well as that two kings cannot sit upon one throne. Jealousies arose between us; my brother had early set every instrument to work to secure to himself the majority of voices in his favour, and I soon began to feel the effect of his intrigues. At length things came to such a pass between us, that I determined, upon pretext of quelling certain rebels in Khorassan, to separate from him: and accordingly gathered all my own followers about me, previously to my departure. On the very night of our separation,—would you believe it, my Amima?—that brother for whom I had done so

much, whom in my heart I loved, and who pretended to return my affection, sent a gang of ruffians, who seized me, threw me down, and with the most unfeeling cruelty deprived me of my eyes ; and that in a manner the most monstrous, digging them from their sockets with the points of their daggers. Ah, I shall never forget the horrors both of mind and body which I then experienced ! — and to crown all, my brother, with the perfection of hypocrisy, came to me, crying and bemoaning my misfortune, upbraiding the wretches who had performed the deed, as if they had acted of their own accord, and threatening to sacrifice them to his vengeance.

“ In time I recovered ; but my brother’s cruelty killed your poor mother. Ah, my child ! how shall I ever make you feel the horrors of my situation ? I still cherished life, supported by my love for you and your brother ; but oftentimes would I call upon death as my only refuge ! The love which the people in general bore me was great, and many of my followers still adhered to my fortunes with constancy. This became a crime in the eyes of the new king ; and it was plain, that, having gone the length he had, he determined to play the

whole game. Cruelty and despotism became now the foundation of his character—no law human or divine could stop him, when ambition or passion prompted him on. He made a charge of conspiracy against me, and determined to rid himself entirely of one who by his existence alone constantly upbraided him with his crimes. Sadek, a Georgian slave, who had adhered to my brother as the eldest, was the person in whom he placed the most confidence, and to him he determined to entrust the perpetration of this horrible deed. When he received the order to put me to death, this faithful man, who was as much attached to me as to my brother, pretended to accede to it, but laid his plans accordingly to save my life. On the night when the order was to be executed, he managed to secrete me with so much skill, that he made my brother believe his orders had been obeyed; and some time after, having purposely secured to himself the possession of a wretched village in this neighbourhood, he conveyed me hither; and here have I passed my life unknown, and, thank God! forgotten.”

The old man finished speaking; a long and affecting silence ensued, during which Amima

pondered over such parts of the narrative as related to herself, and came to the conclusion that it must have been Sadek who had saved her life and brought her to her father. She saw that patience and resignation to her present fate were her only alternative; and she determined from that moment to bid adieu to the world, to devote herself to her father, and to pass her time in imploring from Heaven strength of mind to meet whatever events might be reserved for her during the remainder of her days.

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